

LOST AND FOUND *A Family Memoir*



*Sara Borczuk
Applebaum*

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PROLOGUE

I've heard that, according to Jewish tradition, a person dies two deaths.

The first is the death of the physical body, the second is when he is no longer remembered. Who will keep the memories of my ancestors when I am gone?

The first time I remember seeing a number tattooed on a person's arm and thinking of what it meant, I was thirteen years old. Mr. Zilber and his wife were dear and loving family friends. It was sad that they never had children, I thought. They would have been wonderful parents.

I remember the shock I felt when the reason for their childlessness and the tattooed number were explained to me; a Nazi concentration camp and medical experiments there.

I was too young to remember the horror of World War II. Lucky for me! My brother was much older...not so lucky for him.

My parents are long gone now. They can't answer the questions nagging at me. What was it like? What happened to my family? What about the grandparents I never knew, the cousins and uncles and aunts I should have had as part of my life? Who could tell me my own early history?

QUESTIONS

I was watching the television series, “*The Holocaust*” and was frozen by images of the horrors as they flashed before me. Memories emerged which I had been too young to understand, or make sense of before. The Second World War was spoken of only rarely, never purposely, in our home. Like so many survivors, my parents “protected” me from the painful memories.

As I watched the episodes, it evoked some of those rare conversations. I started with my brother, Mark, who is nine years older than I am. I asked if he had any recollections of the beginning of the war.

He was almost seven on that September day in 1939. I was amazed at the vividness of his description and the power of his account. I started to campaign in earnest for him to share his memories but he found it painful and didn’t want to remember, much less talk about it.

With encouragement from my water aerobics buddies, who are heavily into genealogy, and other “*mavens*”, I took my first steps in the search for answers. There were moments of wonder and moments of complete frustration, when I hit brick walls.

There were funny moments too. I contacted a

distant cousin at his medical office in Orange County and left a message with his receptionist explaining the reason for my call. . I briefly explained our relationship and said that, as the family genealogist, I was inviting him to sign on to *Geni.com*, which is a web based genealogy database. I asked him to call me back if he was interested.

I eventually got his call. After chatting a while, he asked me what a family gynecologist was exactly? I guess the receptionist was used to medical terms more than genealogy and took the message down as she understood it.

There were days and weeks when I worked as one obsessed. At other times, frustration made me shut down.

Other moments were sublime. At our last Passover Seder we recited the names of 27 family members whose fate I found described in Yad Vashem's "*Pages of Testimony*", the database of the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. At the Seder, as our family called out their names, they were remembered once again!

Below is a Page of Testimony about Rishka Borcuk, the mother of my dad's half brother. My uncle Shea, who lived in Israel, submitted the information.



Shea Borczuk

Full Record Details for Borczuk, Rishka (Shea's mother)

Source *Pages of Testimony*
Last Name BORCZUK
First Name RISHKA
Father's First Name AVRAHAM
Mother's First Name FEIGA
Gender Female
Age 55
Place of Birth WYSZKOW,POLAND
Marital Status MARRIED
Spouse's First Name MEIR
Permanent residence WARSZAWA, ,POLAND
Place of Death WARSZAWA,GHETTO
Date of Death 1942
Submitter's Last Name BORCHUK
Submitter's First Name YEHOSHUA
Relationship to victim SON



Hershel Borczuk



Esther Borczuk

My dad's siblings, Shea, Hershel and Esther all made it to Israel

④

יד ושם

ירושלים, רחוב בן-יהודה 12

לדשום חללי השואה והגבורה

[illegible]

FAMILY



*Tel Aviv Beach,
Shprinze, Shea, mom, dad & Avrum*



Yayir & Zipporah Riback



*The three Borczuk Brothers
Shea, Avrum (dad) & Hershel*



*Avrum & Naomi Borchuk's children,
Ehud, Tali & Omer*



*Mom's side of the family
In the back row, right to left, my mother's
brother, Abram Szaja, (my dad to his left)
and his family in City of Akko, near Haifa*

My mother's family came from Lodz, Poland. I've now traced the Szaja/Bendkowski line back to the 1790s. It seems that Bendowski means a person from the town of Bendkow/Bedkow and there is such a place, Latitude 51 35', Longitude 19 45'; what'smore, it is in the same vicinity as a half a dozen towns where the family lived for 4 or 5 generations...Sulejow, Belchatow, Przyglow,Lodz, and Piotrkow ,where my earliest known ancestor is buried.

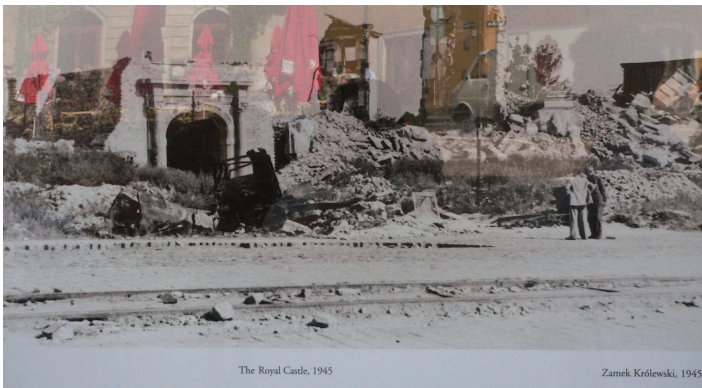
A few years ago, I managed to get to Lodz in Poland and found the house where my great grandfather, Abram Icek Szaja, lived at 81 Pomorska Street until he died on November 6, 1892. That was the year of a devastating Cholera outbreak. So many also died of Typhus, that a lot of victims were buried in mass graves.

My great grandfather, Abraham Icek is listed on the Constant Citizens Register of Lodz. It lists his birth on March 8, 1842 in Zgierz, just North of Lodz.



The last house my great grandfather lived in on 81 Pomorska Street in Lodz, Poland until 1892. I took this picture in 2005

My father's family came from Warsaw.
Old Warsaw rebuilt



The Royal Castle, 1945

Zamek Królewski, 1945

As it looked in 1945

LOST

I remember my mother saying "Like a stone...alone" many times. I somehow understood it had a deep meaning for her but never asked her directly what it meant. She suffered from a profound loneliness and I think I took in that feeling. I understood that the world was a dangerous place where anything you had or anyone you had become, could disappear in a moment. In her life, it had.

In spite of her evident intelligence, capability and strength, my mother was immensely insecure. She was only eleven years old when her own mother died. My grandmother, Bina Laja, had been a kind and caring woman. She gave of herself generously, she nursed family who had fallen victim to an epidemic, typhoid I think it was that last time; it killed her at 41.

My grandfather, Szlomo, whose wife was his everything, gave up on life when she died. Because of that, my mother was doubly orphaned, in spirit. Her older siblings were grown and away.

A year later, her younger sister, Dora, died at eight in my mother's arms. That was her second loss.

In time, she grew up and met my father and married. My sister, Lili, was born first and then, 18 months later, my brother Mark.

Mother developed a career as a business woman. She created something akin to an early Wedding Registry where young couples could pay a little at a time for their trousseaus, monogrammed linens, household goods...all the things they needed to set up a home. She extended credit, dealt with merchants...all this in the nineteen thirties.

She and my father built a family and some security together, but it was taken from her too, by war.



My mother, Yachet Szaja Borczuk



*Mom and my sister, Lili or my brother Mark who
was blond*



*This picture was on visa document
for a trip from Poland to Belgium in 1932.*

Lili would then have been almost one.

In the 1930's, my mother's sister, Betty, who was childless, was living in Antwerp, Belgium. She and her husband owned a fashion house called "*Maison Betty*" and lived in a grand home with marble staircases, glistening wooden floors and Persian carpets. She invited my mother to come for a nice long visit.

It was many years before I found out what happened to my sister. When it was spoken of, which was rarely, it was always in roundabout ways....with a feeling of profound sadness and pain.

As I grew up, I was told that Lili had stayed with her aunt while my mother went back to Poland to wind up things there in preparation for moving the family to Belgium.

As best as I can determine, there may have been two trips to Poland. The first entry into Belgium appears to have been May 15, 1932. Mom would then already have been pregnant with my brother Mark, who was born January 28, 1933. The second trip appears to have been August 1, 1936. My sister then would have been barely five.

It seems remarkable looking back at it that I lived with this nebulous uncertainty of the facts, but it was such a sore spot that it seemed cruel

to keep reopening the wound, so I did it rarely...gingerly...and never really got the whole story. Now all the witnesses to the whole truth are gone and the documentary evidence only suggests possible answers.

The number of days I actually remember spending with my sister, I can count on my fingers. I was about four and a half when I met her and she was about sixteen. She spoke French, I didn't. I knew something tragic had happened but no-one explained it to me and I wouldn't have understood anyway.

September 1939, Warsaw was attacked and World War II was on. Then came escape. When my aunt and uncle were informed that we had somehow survived the war, they had already raised Lili for many years and regarded her as their own child.

Our return caused intense feelings all around. On their part, a fear of loss of one they considered their child. On my parents' part there was a sense of betrayal.

Even though Lili survived and my parents survived, they were, in effect, lost to one another.

Lili was a teenager who believed she had been abandoned. We never knew for sure if she was told this deliberately or not. Lili died tragically at the age of 43 and I know the issue was never completely resolved, adding to her pain and to the loss we all felt at her deathbed.

The sadness came from the fact that somehow my parents & brother were separated from my sister and the situation in Europe was dire. My parents weren't allowed to return to Belgium and my aunt wouldn't bring Lili to Poland. She said it was too dangerous.

It's hard to know what the travel limitations were then or when it became imprudent or impossible, but Europe was definitely in turmoil long before Poland was actually invaded.


In 1935 Germany broke the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. In 1936 German troops reoccupied the Rhineland and the Rome-Berlin Axis was signed. In 1938 was the 'Anschluss' with Austria and the Sudetenland was handed to Germany as a result of the Munich conference. 1939 The rest of the Czech lands were occupied by Germany and Germany invaded Poland. World War II began.

Several years ago I asked Lili's husband if he might have any documents related to Lili that might be helpful.

This document registers the birth of Lili's son, Daniel. It lists her husband Nathan Neutel and his parents names.

It also states that Lili is the daughter of Abram Borczuk and Yachet Szaja Borczuk and the adopted daughter of Abram Ber Kupersztyck and Blima (Betty) Szaja Kuperstyck.


STAD ANTWERPEN



ARGENTINE 4


Burgelijke Stand

Ondergetekende, Ambtenaar van de
Burgelijke Stand der stad Antwerpen
verklaart en bevestigt dat beden, voor hem,
in het huwelijk zijn getreden: Rathan
K u p e r s z y c k, op 7 December 1931 te Ant-
werpen geboren, zoon van Henryk en van
Chana Laja Rosenbaum, ter eene;
en: Elzbieta K u p e r s z y c k, op
20 Juni 1931 te Warschau in Polen geboren,
dochter van Abram Borszuk en van Jachet
Szaja en aangenomen dochter van Abram Her
Kuperszyck en van Blima Szaja, ter andere
zijde, -----



Afgetekend in aanwezig van art. 18 van de Grondwet
Antwerpen, d. Januari 1955


Huwelijksakte van 11-12-1931 van
Name Jan van der Cluyt alhier



LIEUW BETTY ROZAN KUPERSZYCK & NATHAN NEUTELS
PARIS 1930

KINDEREN UIT DAT HUWELIJK GESPROTEN

Nummer van de Akte	VOORNAMEN VAN DE KINDEREN		GEOORTE	
	Plaats	Datum	Plaats	Datum
48	Daniel	11-02-1931	WILHELM	07-01-1931



STAD ANTWERPEN
F 22
0140

This was the first evidence I saw that my aunt and uncle had adopted Lili and what her legal maiden name was, Elzbieta Kupersztyck.

STATELESS

My parents were both born in Poland, but as Jews they were never quite "Poles" but kind of outsiders. I was born in Kyrgyzstan but I was never "Kyrgyz". I never even had a birth certificate. Being born in Kyrgyzstan was a sort of accident of war. I never lost my homeland because I never had one.

We were one family of many thousands who escaped Poland into Russia, and were sent to Siberia, to the area of the Archangel Forest, "*Arkhangelsk*".

We were eventually released...only to be sent into Kyrgyzstan, one of the Asian Republics. The USSR needed workers in the cement factories and the oil fields.

There's a 2007 documentary film, you can see on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug5vW0t1t00), about the Jews who were "***Saved by Deportation***" from death in the Nazi camps of Poland like Bergen Belsen, Auschwitz and Majdanek.

"In 1940, a year before the Nazis started deporting Jews to death camps, Joseph Stalin ordered the deportation of approximately 200,000 Polish Jews from Russian-occupied Eastern Poland to forced labor settlements in the Soviet Interior. As cruel as Stalin's deportations were, ultimately they largely saved Jewish lives, for the deportees constituted the overwhelming majority of Polish Jews who escaped the Nazi Holocaust....it retraces the path traveled more than 60 years ago from Poland to Siberia to the former Soviet states of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia"

www.imdb.com/title/tt1260395/

After the war, our family documents said we were "stateless" and in Belgium illegally. My aunt and uncle arranged for us to be smuggled out of Germany where we were in a German Refugee camp in the British Zone. Pretending to be German Jews was how my family managed to get out of Poland, which by then had turned Communist. My parents were desperate to return to my sister. They were able to pull it off because they both spoke German well.



Various Post War papers: document that they were in a refugee camp in the British Zone, Transit visas, documents that they were “stateless”, my mother’s U.S. “green card”, my dad’s union membership card

After the war, my family and I were "stateless". We were displaced persons, and in Belgium illegally, and were only allowed there in transit to another country.

We were granted only three months temporary residency in Belgium while we made transit arrangements to go somewhere else. We were there for five years.



*Early picture in Belgium, at the beach
Dad, Mom, Mark & me at 5 or 6*

On paper, we claimed to be supported by my aunt and uncle who mailed us a monthly check.

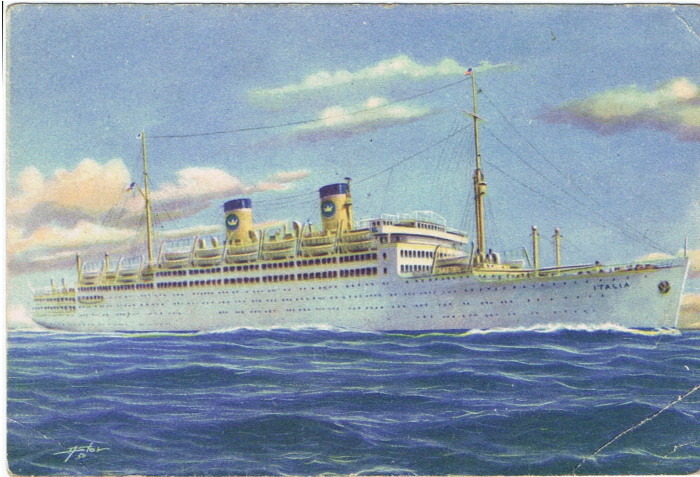
In fact, my father worked for a cousin on his mother's side who owned a leather purse manufacturing company, Traksbetryger's. He periodically paid back my aunt and uncle who supposedly supported us. This state of affairs went on for five long years, until we got a Visa to come to America.

The absolutely last extension that the Belgian Government authorized was until July 1952.

I remember worried conversations between my parents whether the fact that I was born in the USSR could keep us from being approved for entry into the U.S., and the certainty that being caught in a lie about my birthplace most certainly would.

Remember, this was the time of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings in the U.S.

The visa came through for April.



The ship Italia on which we arrived in New York Harbor April 10, 1952

The ship 609 feet long, 78 feet wide, was built by Blom & Voss of Hamburg in 1928 for the Swedish American Line SAL and named the Kungsholm.

She was requisitioned by the US Government during World War II and renamed "John Ericsson". ***During the war she operated as a troop carrier and took part in the invasion of Normandy on D-Day in 1944.***

She was sold to Home Lines in 1948, refitted and renamed "Italia". She served until 1964, used as a floating hotel, the Imperial Bahama, by Freeport Bahama Enterprises for a year and was then sold for scrap in 1965. When we sailed on her, she was a one-class ship. No first class, but no steerage either. I don't think cruise ships had stabilizers like they do today.

I remember one very stormy day, the crew placed wooden frame-like contraptions around each place setting at the table, so the plates, glasses and silverware wouldn't slide off the tables.

People were trying to dance in the ballroom and having a time of it keeping their footing...and I made a green faced dash for the railing that evening, and just barely made it. Felt a lot better afterwards.



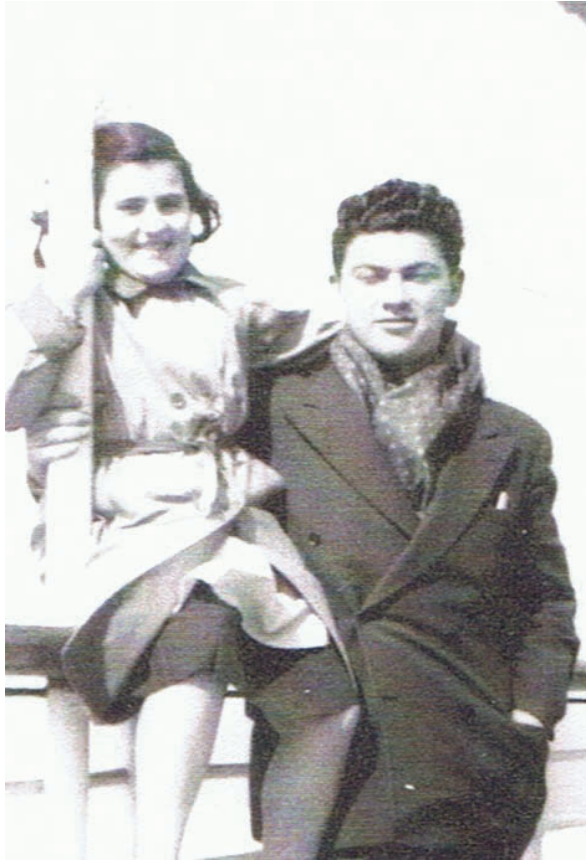
That's me "Coming to America"

COMING TO AMERICA

It wasn't until I became an American citizen at eighteen that I really "belonged" somewhere and had a country. Had we not been granted an American Visa in 1952, I would have emigrated to Israel and had an entirely different life. Not too many countries accepted, let alone welcomed, Jews either during or right after the war. Israel was one country that did.



Here I am with my mom and dad aboard ship



*Here I am with my brother, Mark
I remember that my long pigtails were cut off a
few days before sailing
...more American looking perhaps?*

1952 was a very special year. We landed in New York 10 days later than expected because the ship was slightly damaged on route and had to sail into a harbor in Newfoundland briefly, for repairs. We had spent Passover at sea. The Italian Captain and Crew put on a memorable Seder for the Jewish passengers.

Originally, we were slated to go to Pittsburgh. Because of the delay, the quota there was filled and we were told we could stay in New York or we could go somewhere else. My parents picked "somewhere else". That turned out to be Louisville, Kentucky.

I remember the first American song I learned "*Hey, Good Lookin*" by Hank Williams...can you picture it...little Russian girl from Belgium singing a Hank Williams song? When I learned to speak English, it was with a decided southern accent.

It was now late April. My parents took me to the local school. Because I didn't speak English, the school planned to put me in first grade. In Belgium, I had been near the end of fifth grade. I'm not sure who explained it to us, because no one there spoke French. Maybe a member of the local Jewish "Joint" was there as a translator.

The Joint Distribution Committee helped new immigrants get settled in. I think maybe they helped get us our first place to live in Louisville. I also think they promoted a few pieces of used furniture. I recall an old gas refrigerator with a

round thing on top. I think the brand was Servel. It must have been quite old and probably donated to the organization...but it worked.

We asked that the school test me so I could be placed in the proper grade. I went home and tried to prepare for a test I foolishly expected to be in French. The day came.

I was shown an attribute block pattern. They're like little flat wooden pieces in different geometric shapes and colors in a large pattern. They dumped it over and required me to recreate the pattern.

It was strange to me, and not at all the kind of test I had expected. I had never had or played with a puzzle. Luckily I was a pretty quick study. It turned out it was a non-verbal I.Q. test...and I guess I passed. They placed me in fifth grade to finish out the year.



*Tingley Elementary School, Louisville, Kentucky.
I'm in the 1st standing row. The girl with the
dress on.*

I could easily read English words...pronounced like French of course...and I had no idea what they meant. I tried to follow all that went on in class, the pledge of allegiance and the Christian Bible reading every morning. After just a few weeks, school came to an end and it was summer.

My parents were very anxious that I learn English; therefore they decided to send me to camp. It was a Jewish Camp sponsored by the YMHA, Young Men's Hebrew Association, and on the border with Tennessee. I was sent there for a six-week session.

There wasn't a soul there who spoke French or even Yiddish. If I wasn't going to be totally isolated, I had to learn English...and fast! I did!

Upon returning to Louisville, I had the rudiments pretty well down. Within about six months, I was getting straight A's. There is nothing like desperation to motivate you. Camp was the first time I remember being away from my family.

At camp I learned a few more American songs. The second one was "*Blue Moon*". There was a camp counselor who taught us to sing some songs in four-part harmony. I remember particularly "*Down by The Old Mill Stream*"

After the initial shock of the very alien environment of this camp, I grew to love it. I'd describe it as "charming primitive".

The cabins were wooden, with clunky wooden shutters in case of rain or storms. Light was provided to each camper by a flashlight.



At YMHA camp, I'm on the right

The only buildings that had electricity, as I recall, were the Administration building, the cafeteria and the latrine! I remember it was inhabited by “daddy long legs” and smelled perpetually of a cleaning solution with a lot of ammonia!

I remember we drank a lot of Kool Aid, which we referred to as “bug Juice”. Making friends was easy and I only remember a couple of unpleasant experiences.

One was walking down a muddy path after some rain and slipping onto my behind...right beside a snake. My screams could have awakened the dead. It turned out that this particular snake was harmless, but the area had two types of highly poisonous snakes, Copperheads and

Water Moccasins. I was to have several encounters with them over the three years I spent at the camp...but luckily they minded their own business and I minded mine.

The second unpleasant experience was a trick played on me by several girls. They showed me a tree growing along a path where we were hiking and told me the green fruit was a kind of apple, and urged me to try one. In actuality they were persimmons, unripe ones. Have you ever tried a green persimmon? It tastes like alum...a very strong astringent. It felt like my mouth would never un-pucker!

I went back to that camp every summer for three years, until we moved to Los Angeles in 1955.

When we first got to Louisville, Kentucky, dad got work in a metal shop owned by a German man with whom he could communicate. He was a skilled craftsman and was paid the grand salary of one dollar an hour.

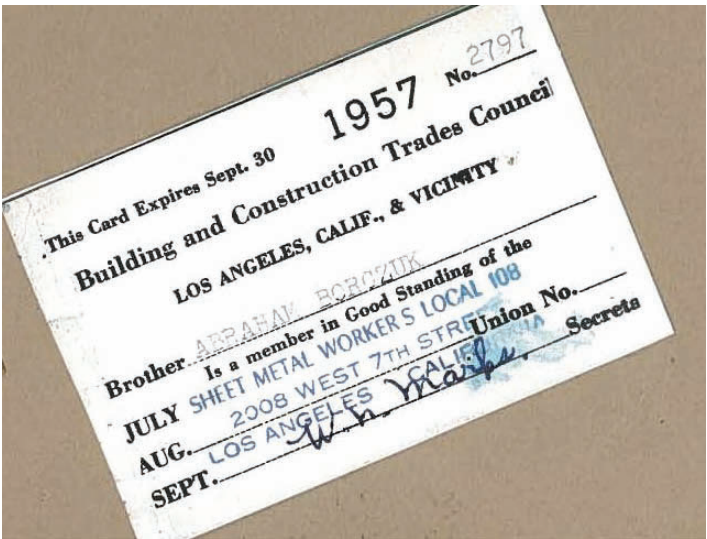
Within a year, dad's English was good enough to get a union job and things were better. Then, the union went on strike... a long strike. We didn't have the means to hold out, so dad thought about what he could do.

He asked around and heard there was work in California. He found a job there and sent for us. He rented a small house in Boyle Heights, close to his work.

Boyle Heights had once been a mostly Jewish neighborhood, but that was a long time before we moved there. In the fall of 1955, when we arrived, it was a mix of people of every kind and color and ethnicity, but mostly Mexican.

Our little bungalow had a large front yard with an immense avocado tree. I had never before seen an avocado, neither had mom.

Even so, she developed a recipe to use those avocados. It had chopped hard boiled eggs, mashed avocado, a little salt, pepper and chives...a kind of avocado egg salad without mayo. That was long before we had heard of guacamole. I still make avocado that way.



Dad's Union Card

It was in Los Angeles that I grew up. First I went to school at Hollenbeck Jr. High in Boyle Heights, then to Los Angeles High school. I started college at 17 and loved my years at UCLA. Every bit of it was wondrous to me.

I met Harvey the summer between High School and College when I had a temporary job at Fox West Coast Theaters and he worked at Twentieth Century Fox.



This is Harvey at 24, when I met him

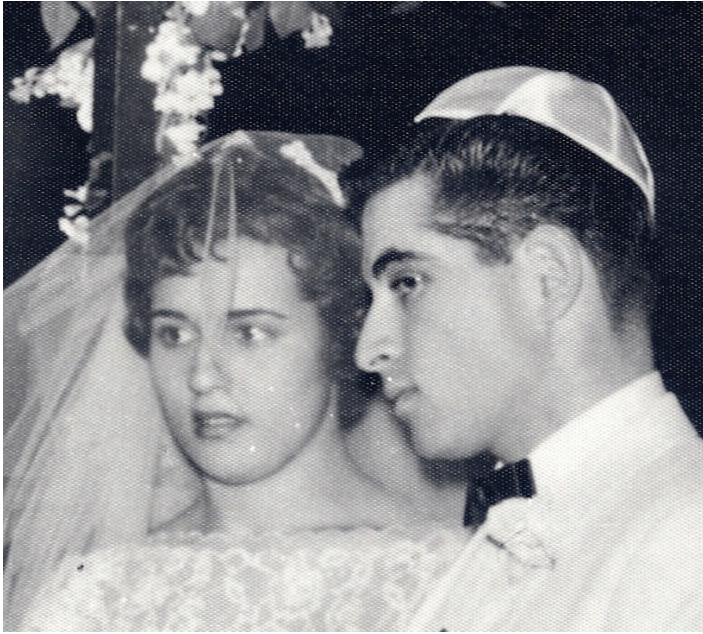
It was love at first sight! I married just before I turned 18, during Winter Break of my first year at UCLA. I remember I had to do some studying on my honeymoon in Big Bear, California.

I returned to UCLA a married woman for my second semester. The result was that my scholarship was pulled, in spite of a 3.85 grade point average...because they said I now had a husband to support me!

My original professional goal had been the Foreign Service...which was none too welcoming to women in those days. I went to a recruitment meeting and was told to apply for a secretarial job in one of our embassies if I liked that life.

Only when I found out that I'd have to wait ten years to apply to the Foreign Service because I was a naturalized citizen...was I finally discouraged from a career as a diplomat.

At eighteen, waiting a decade is like waiting a lifetime.



*Bride and groom under the Chuppah
(traditional wedding canopy)*



December 19, 1959, that's me

My son, Steve, was born on May 18, 1964, when I was 22 ½ and I returned to school within a few months, with the help of my wonderful parents.

My parents raised him almost as much as Harvey and I did those first five years. That was when we moved to the Valley.

They kept referring to Steve as “der kind” till his Bar Mitzvah...when we all insisted they stop.



*Steve's Bar Mitzvah
Temple Solael
Canoga Park, California
MAY 21, 1977*

Although it wasn't what I had planned to do, I have no regrets about my career in education. All in all it was very satisfying and worthwhile, at times frustrating and difficult, but all in all a rewarding career. I later got my Masters at Pepperdine. I was in education for 38 years and retired as a school principal.

My brother, Mark, was drafted a few months after coming to the United States. He was old enough to remember many languages from the years in Europe and the Army quickly saw the value of it and trained him further by sending him to Language School. He ended up staying in the Army for 20 years doing many tours of duty in Germany and two in Vietnam.

Mark and I lived either on different continents or different Coasts for many years. Eventually he moved to California too. That's when we began to know one another as adults.

Even though I was one of three children, I mostly grew up as an only child.

I hadn't grown up with Lili at all. Mark was away at O.R.T. It was a group of trade schools that offered broad vocational training. They were set up in Europe to save the remnant of Jewish youth after World War II. It's now international.

He got a fantastic education there, but was essentially away for three years, from the time I was about age seven to ten. Then after a few months in Kentucky, Mark was drafted into the Army and sent to Europe. Again, it was just me.



REMEMBERING DAD, THE HERO, THE SURVIVOR

I wasn't born yet when the war began. One day, after having watched a television series called "The Holocaust" I called my brother who was nearly seven when the war began in September 1939. I asked him if he remembered that day. It was the first time we had ever talked about it.

Holocaust was a 9 ½ hour miniseries, the story of a Jewish family's struggle to survive the horror of Nazi Germany's systematic extermination of their community. It was shown on NBC in 1978 and won an Emmy.

Mark remembered the beginning of the war vividly. He remembered the noise of the Stukka airplanes bombing the city. He described the red sky, the smoke and the smell. He told of going out of the old city gates of what eventually became the Warsaw ghetto. A man was on the ground screaming. His legs had been blown off.

The next memory he described was when they tried to get home. They headed for the streetcar until they realized they were being strafed. My father climbed through a window to drag my brother and mother out.

Mark also told me of a time when a boiling teakettle saved their lives.

It's funny because that's one story dad had actually told me. On many occasions, when I was

growing up, we had to turn around from wherever we were going and go back because mom thought she had left a light on under a tea kettle.

A story I remember mom telling me was of the big Polish gangster who...contrary to expectation...was a family friend and helped them get their things out of Warsaw, when they made their escape.

Dad clearly understood how dangerous things were going to be and made a quick decision to leave Warsaw.

They took the train toward the Russian border. The train was halted by the Germans, and the passengers were ordered to get off. Then the Jews were told to go to one side, the others were allowed to re-board & continue the journey.

My father considered and went back on the train. His instincts told him this was a dangerous turn...and not necessarily the time for total honesty.

At many turns my parents made one crucial decision after another that proved fateful...and lucky...and the difference between life and death

Any one of many choices could have meant the end for my mother, father and brother...and I would not even have had a beginning.



This is a rare picture of my dad, Abram Borczuk, before the war, probably in his twenties. He is standing on the left and a cousin, is sitting beside him.



*Here, dad is in his sixties, living in America.
The tattoo, 2 crossed flags, is from a boxing club
he belonged to as a young man in Warsaw*

Trees have been planted in the Holy Land



Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives

FIFTY TREES HAVE BEEN PLANTED IN JERUSALEM, ISRAEL.....

And when ye shall come into the land And ye shall plant...

LEVITICUS 19:23

IN MEMORY OF YOUR BELOVED HUSBAND, FATHER, GRANDFATHER

A B R A H A M B O R C Z U K

- ALAV HASHALOM -
On The Occasion Of Yahrzeit
May His Memory Be Blessed...

Planted By:

FOLK ORGANIZATIONS-J.N.F.

BNAY UBNOTH SEGELMAN FOR J.N.F.



Nahum Moxson
NAHUM MOXSON, ORG. DIRECTOR

Ethel Spilberg
ETHEL SPILBERG, PRESIDENT

Jewish National Fund

JULY, 1981

קרן קימת לישראל

I was born in 1942, so much of our family's story between 1939 and 1947, during the war and immediately after, is beyond my remembering.

I urged Mark, for several years to share his memories of our family's experience during that time.

Some of these stories I had heard about over time or learned, but Mark's stories, shared here, come from his experience of living them.

I am grateful that he finally came to share them and understand his reluctance to talk about them.

MY BROTHER MARK'S MEMORIES

Audio taped by him in 2007 and transcribed by me.

I was born in Warsaw, in a hospital. I recall that hospital from several subsequent visits. I was born several weeks late, I was told I weighed in at 12 1/2 pounds and had to be retracted with clamps because I was so big. I was born January 28, 1933.

My next recollection is from our home on Ulica Wolska 7, in Warsaw. We lived on the 2nd or 3rd floor. Second floor means the floor above the main.

I remember a number of things. It was not far from the Kertzelak, which was a sort of outdoor market around the corner. The house we lived in was a kamienica, which means stone building. They were 3 to 5 story high squares with a central courtyard and a gate in the days of coaches you could drive a coach through and in the back there were stalls for keeping coaches and horses, but I don't remember there being any horses when we lived there.

We lived in an apartment. Across from the courtyard there was a rear entry or exit from a movie theatre. I remember that vaguely. As you came up into our home, on the left you entered into the kitchen and then a large, high ceilinged living room.



I did find the street where my family lived in Warsaw before the war. Ulica Wolska #7. That house is now a modern apartment building, but here is a house very like what it was, down the street about a block.

I was the only boy, and being part of a somewhat traditional Jewish family, I was the crown jewel, the name bearer.

I remember my visit to a hospital and its cold... cold tile and I remember sitting in a dentist style chair to have my tonsils removed and being given ice cream.

It took me to age 40 to realize that some of those memories of my visits to that hospital, when I had scarlet fever, combined with mental pictures of World War II, created a nightmare that I lived with for some 20 years.

That was when it finally went away and I realized what the components were. Before age 40 it didn't make any sense to me.

I had two Catholic nannies. One was a young woman and one was an old woman, very pious. I had scarlet fever; apparently things looked very bad and there was a remaining spot on my lungs. These ladies used to go to church and pray for me. To thank them, my mom promised them that if all went well and I recovered, they could put up a big Christmas tree for me. In fact, that's what they did.

I recall a big Christmas tree, I guess about 15 feet tall, covered with candle holders and candles. Most of the decorations were aluminum painted figurines; candies were hanging all over the tree. As a special gift, I remember, they bought me a chocolate sheep that weighed 2 1/2 kilos. I ate the whole thing, apparently. That's one of the memories I have.

After I came out of the hospital, after I had scarlet fever, I remember that there was a nurse that would come twice a day and she'd give me a shot. It got so bad that every time the doorbell rang, I climbed the walls. This went on for a while.

Another one of those cameos that I remember was when I was crawling size. I crawled under the sink and picked up some kind of cleaning substance, lye, I think, and drank it. I must have been five or less. I remember my bedroom, it had a brass bed; there was a four foot high pile of toys. I had toys coming and going.

One of the last things I remember of that apartment before the war was that we had bought a fancy radio. It was a Phillips and it had what they called Magiczne Oko (A Magic Eye) and when you tuned it you could see it. I recall an announcement that they were going to defend the territory of Poland to the last drop of blood. The next day we got blasted...our first bombing run.

Needless to say, all of that is very clear in my memory. I remember walking around the corner on Ulica Wolska 7. I don't know if it still exists or what happened to it. I haven't been back. Probably someone built one of those "People's apartment buildings" there.

It was a very nice apartment. It was a very cozy life. My dad was a foreman at Orlan, which was a big factory where they made metal cans. I don't know if they canned there or they just made the cans but I understand it was a very large factory.

He was a foreman and on the side he was a quasi-socialist revolutionary, labor organizer. I was told by dad and by mom especially that

occasionally he was picked up and spent a day in jail. Mom apparently told him “you better straighten up and fly right.

I’m not going to have my husband spending weekends in jail and wondering where he’s at.” I don’t know whether he in fact did it, but I know that was the story.

Mom, although she came from a not very affluent family, was in business... trading, textiles and things like that. Mom had this wonderful idea. You didn’t get married in Poland then unless you had you “*aussteuer*”, in German, that meant your plates and sheets and tablecloths and what have you; things with your initials and so on.

A lot of the Polish working class girls and young men from the factories didn’t have the up front cash. Mom set up what’s known in Yiddish as a *Wexel gesheft*, which is basically an installment kind of business.

The people would come and tell mom what they wanted and had to spend. Mom would recommend things, take them to tailors, pick whatever they wanted and could afford. She would order the items and they would sign checks. What they called *wexel*. Then periodically that *wexel* would become due and the people would pay. Apparently mom was quite successful at it.

This area where we lived was in the new part of Warsaw. Because it was close to where my dad worked. It wasn't in the *Nalefki*, the Jewish section. There was quite a Jewish population in Warsaw. We didn't live in the Jewish section. We lived more in a gentile world rather than the Jewish section.

I remember going to the zoo. You had to take a streetcar and go over the Wisla River. I remember crossing over a big bridge over the Wisla River when we went to the zoo. I don't remember too many details but I do remember a big comic book called TARZAN (pronounced *Tazan* in Polish).

Because of my health problems, everybody wanted to make sure I ate enough. I remember that the only way they got me to eat cooked carrots was to put a piece of chocolate on every spoonful. The one picture I have of myself as a little boy, I was very rotund...a fat little guy.

I remember that, after I came out of the hospital, mom rented a cottage in a sort of wooded resort area. She took me out for a summer and stayed with me. Dad had to work so he came out on the train on weekends. I remember the area. It was quite lovely, a little dry. I remember a guy with two goats. He'd walk them up and down. Mom would wave to him and he'd come over with his metal can and milk the goat. I had the dubious honor of drinking warm goat's milk. I also remember running into a fence and getting a nail into my calf. I still have the scar to this

day. Apparently it became infected. Those are little things I remember from before the war.

We lived in a very nice area. Not too far from there, there was a railroad station. I don't remember its name. It was near a market.

I remember hearing on the radio, I believe it was Marshalek Pilsudski, saying that they would not surrender a single piece of Poland. The next day the German planes were over Warsaw. We were certain that we were going to be bombed first because we were in the modern section of town where many of the industries were located and we were certain they would target those. Apparently they decided to go after the old part of Warsaw and they did a pretty good job on the Jewish section. They must have wanted to save those factories because they had decided to use them ...or god knows what other motives they had.

Anyway, the next day bombs were falling. We heard noises on the roof of our building, something like very heavy machine guns firing up. Everybody was in a panic. Things were burning, you heard planes and you heard shooting, cannons and machine guns...and there was I, a little kid.

In the meantime, what I didn't know was that in the adjoining kamienica, courtyard, they were building a giant bunker, covered with large wooden logs and earth. Either the first or second day of the war, I remember our area

coming under fire. My dad grabbed me and my mom and started coming down the stairs, going to the back of the yard, 50 to 70 meters back to the wall separating the two yards. Someone had made a hole in it so people were going into that bunker. There was shooting and bombing going on and we ran.

About 3/4 of the way to that wall, my mom realized...or thought that the gas wasn't turned off. No matter what my dad said, my mother ran back to check the gas. She told my dad to grab me and take me to the bunker. My dad went all the way to the opening. He was torn between taking me into it and running back to get her. He was sort of standing there. Finally he turned around, grabbed me and went to get mom.

As we approached the steps mom was coming down. Apparently she really had left on the gas. As we turned around...about 10-15 meters to the left we heard a giant explosion from the bunker area. By the time we had crossed over the wall opening, we discovered that a bomb had hit the bunker head on and caused logs to crash down. It crushed everybody in it. Talk about fate...forgetfulness...gas.

Had mom not gone back to turn off the gas...had my dad not gone after her...that would have been the end of the story. I'm not one to believe in predestination because it doesn't make any sense to me. But it's certainly a series of

coincidences that shows the tremendous control we have over our destinies.

We didn't ...it saved our lives. We managed...I don't know how...part streetcar and part walking, we managed to get to the Jewish section of Warsaw and later my dad explained his rationale to me.

Probably there was going to be a siege. Some of our relatives there had a bakery and there we'd be assured of at least having bread during the siege.

We ended up in this big kamienica...a big multi story square building. In the back, were barns, In the front, a big gate. All at once holy hell exploded. As night came, the sky looked a dirty orange color with white yellowish pieces flying through the sky. The gate through which we had entered the building was on fire. So my dad grabbed us and we went into a sub-basement. We spent the night there. Before entering it, we saw that the whole building, all 4 sides were in flames. Somehow we were in the sub-basement and it didn't burn down there.

I remember coming out the next morning and watching the burned ruins of the building. We didn't see a living soul, just ashes and frames and those things that hadn't collapsed. Mainly it was piles of ashes and rubble. Somehow the gate still stood. Dad grabbed us and we headed for that gate. What I saw next was something that will never leave my memory.

In the streets there were streetcars with the electric lines damaged, some hanging, some not. Dead horses were lying around, because coaches were still in use. Many, many dead people were strewn haphazardly up and down the street. The sight that somehow registered particularly, as we came out of the gate, on the left side, leaning against the wall, I was sitting a stocky man with curly Afro-like hair moaning. As I looked down, I noticed that both of his legs were missing and above the knee blood was dripping out. I don't know where the legs were. The thought I remember having was "How come he isn't dead?"

It's a horror picture I'll never be able to erase...though I never had nightmares about it. To this day I wonder why I was thinking that...sort of removed emotionally...detached thoughts.

A little bit later, they got one of the streetcars going and people rushed to get on. Somehow dad got mom and me in and he was left behind. All of a sudden Stuka planes came flying down the street and opened up with their machine guns. Everybody went crazy and the thing I remember was that my father became like a lion

I don't know how he got up to one of the windows of the streetcar. He jumped up, clawed up bare walls, tore one of the windows open, swung half of his body into the streetcar, grabbed me, pulled me out and then pulled mom out through that window. People were trampling

each other to death trying to get out of there and no one else was getting out.

This was the first example I remember of the heroic aspects of my father. A man who people might not have seen that way. That was the first time he saved our cookies.

Shortly thereafter, as the *Stukkas* came down the street again, we ran across the street to another basement with stairs leading down to a small restaurant that had a bar. They took the kids and sat them on the bar, maybe 30 by 20 feet, maybe 40. The Red Cross lady gave tea to the children. I don't remember how long we were there, but it was morning. All of a sudden a bomb, about 4 feet long and maybe 12 " in diameter slid down the steps and through the door of the restaurant without exploding. Everybody went crazy. My dad grabbed me and we got out the other door. That's what I remember.

My dad, in crisis, was a tower of strength! He acted. He was quite a guy. I remember getting out the back door. I don't remember how exactly we got back to our home. But we did get back.

The bombing continued for several days. Next thing we knew, we saw big columns of German troops in uniforms lined up and marching down Ulica Wolska, which is where we lived. I remember seeing them marching. It was a big wide street, like an avenue.

A few days later, the Germans came into the courtyard and made announcements. My mother spoke German because she was born in Lodz, which was an ethnic German town with many weavers. About 60 % of the people there were of German extraction and German was commonly spoken.

Mom also spoke Yiddish, which was very similar to German, told me that they said "*Ale Juden Runter*" ...All Jews Come Down...They started to inventory Jews. They weren't pulling them in yet. That started a couple of days later.

Now I'm going to digress a little.

Mom and dad were thinking about how to survive. It was permitted, at this time, for Jews to leave and head for the Russian border, as long as they didn't take anything with them. So that was the decision they made, to leave.

Before that, a little anecdote... people were expecting to be starving, so food warehouses were broken into and people took food. I remember dad got a piece of salt pork. I remember eating a sandwich with a slice of salted pork.

My grandfather on my father's side was a tall man with a big beard. A lot of Polish hooligans, if they got tired of drinking vodka and chasing women, thought it was fun to go down to the Jewish section to see if they could harass and beat up some Jews.

One Sunday, my grandfather was sitting in the courtyard playing cards with some friends when a number of these gangsters showed up. My grandfather was a very big man. When challenged, he gave as good as he got. He beat the hell out of all three of them. I know it doesn't sound like a Jewish story of passivity, but that's what he did.

One of those three was a big thief. In fact one of this guy's exploits was to kidnap trains transporting vodka, pull them to a side railing, pull up tank cars, empty out the vodka and head out. He was a grand style bandit.

This happened long before the war but mom remembered it. She thought maybe this guy could get some of our possessions out of Warsaw since we couldn't carry them, so she got in touch with him. Apparently, after the beating my grandfather gave them...to this guy's way of thinking...he was an okay guy. He said ...“nobody touches this guy. He's a good Yid...under my personal protection”!

My mom called on him and said ” we need your help “. He agreed in the name of my grandfather. He asked for the key to the house. My mom had silver and textiles and many things. They packed them into big bags. I particularly remember things stuffed into several mattress covers. The only thing we were allowed to take personally was one small suitcase each. She turned over the keys to him.

She went out and bought heavy sweaters for each of us and in the sleeves and hems she sewed in a bunch of 20 dollars gold pieces. I remember those cattle cars vividly. If you've seen the film "Dr. Zhivago" you know what I'm talking about. After they packed it full, we headed down to the Russian-Polish border. Remember that Russia and Germany divided up Poland, at the Bug River. Anyway we crossed the border near the Bug River.

Finally we arrived at a terminal. We were pushed out and started walking to a checkpoint; it was several kilometers from where the train stopped. We passed a group of guardhouses. One of the German guards was sitting with a Polish woman in one of the guard-posts. I don't know why he wanted a six year old child's sweater, but he pulled it off my back and gave it to her. Maybe she had a kid, I don't know. She didn't know all she was getting!

We had to walk a gauntlet; they separated the women and the men. I went with my dad. I remember one of those Gestapo boys already had his aggressive style. The war had just started, but he was already prepared with his whip. He whipped mom. It was a heavy leather whip, like fingertip around. He whipped her to cause her to move along. Dad went almost loco. Mom had to yell at him to be quiet or we wouldn't get any further.

We reached the checkpoint and we ended up at the border. I remember it was rainy and muddy.

They tucked me under a hay wagon, which sat under a tree. This provided a little bit of protection. It rained every night and some of the day.

The people were waiting for the Russians to open the border. They would open it periodically and let a number of people across. That border was mined. It was under gunfire. People were desperate to get across. My dad, being an entrepreneur got across the first night. He crossed over, went about 30 kilometers under fire, through mud, through canals, through ditches to a small village. He found a Jewish farmer and rented a cottage from him. The next day he returned and crossed the border back to our side and we were re-united.

We were waiting there because that “ bandit “ was going to load our things and bring them to the border. Talk about honor among crooks! We spend several soggy and wet days at that border with thousands of people scattered all around us. It rained now and then.

One morning, with the sun breaking through, we heard music from the field getting louder and louder. Then we saw a big hay-wagon with a bunch of people sitting on it. There sits the bandit, his girlfriend and a bunch of his friends sitting on top of boxes and mattress covers full of mom’s stuff...you name it...it was there. I remember there were at least two full mattress covers.

My mom jumped up and yelled and they came over. Sure enough they brought our stuff. They unloaded everything, wished us well, turned around and left, singing songs. Mom was overjoyed. This was proof of her endeavors...of her work.

We were trying to get emotionally ready to cross the border. This happened mainly at night. The border was mined and you could see tracer bullet fire and flares. Dad having been there and having returned, was ready.

Now there were thousands of soaked people waiting for the Russians to open the border for 5 minutes at a time. Whoever made it in, that was it. I don't know why they did it that way; maybe it was to control the volume of people entering.

The word spread, people found out somehow that dad had been there, knew a route and had gotten back. He was the "expert"! People offered him lots of money to help them get across the border. There were a number of young men in their 20s or 30s. Dad gave them instructions, "follow me, stay close and stay quiet". We had 4 or 6 young men that carried our stuff. We made it across the wires. Dad was hanging on to me and I to him.

I don't remember if it was already fall. We kept falling into ditches. At my height, I was in up to my chest. When the firing got too close, dad guided us through the ditches, which afforded some protection from the gunfire.

We saw flares, tracer bullets you name it. We went on for several hours. Suddenly mom called out to dad, "Where are the guys with the mattress covers?" Apparently, we lost them. Material things were important to mom. She didn't have them as a child. She got very upset so dad said "Shah" (be quiet). He led us out of the ditches to a clearing within 1 or 2 kilometers of some woods. There must have been moonlight because I remember seeing the woods. Dad said, "you all stay here and I'll see what happened to them".

As the hours passed, mom became more and more panicky. It was maybe 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. The group decided it wasn't good to be in the clearing, so they took off for the woods. We got there. They were fairly clear of underbrush. Suddenly we started seeing flashlights and hearing dogs barking. Dawn came and mom was desperate.

As it got light, we saw, through the trees, a white building. Didn't know what it was. She said that whatever happens, happens now. I've lost my Avrum. Let's see if we can get some help. So off we went towards the buildings.

As we approached, we realized it was a tiny terminal, about the size of a two-room cabin, whitewashed. People were standing around what seemed to be the end of a railroad line. There were about 40 or 50 people milling around.

As we approached, there was dad with a canister of warm milk for his son and those two guys with the mattress covers full of stuff. Mom almost fainted from joy. I had warm milk. I still don't know how he got it.

He told us the story later. He went back. Apparently the mattress full of stuff was too much for them. The Russians chased them down and back toward the border. They were going to take the stuff. Dad went back and argued with them that it was his stuff and he wasn't going to let them have it. Somehow it worked. So, the Russians told him and the two guys to take the stuff and go back across the border to the Polish side. After a short while, the three re-crossed the border (the third time for my dad).

When he got back to where he had left us and didn't find us, he figured we would have gone to where there were some people. That's where he went, and that's where he waited for us, with the warm milk. I'd hate to figure out the odds that brought us back together.

A lot of families, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers lost one another in this exodus. Dad had rented a cottage. I don't remember if we walked there or got a ride on a horse and carriage but anyway, we arrived. It was a two story cottage in a little area of trees. The land around was all flat and wheat fields. In the distance were a few groups of trees. We stayed there weeks, maybe months.

I was always a potato freak. I remember mom pouring milk in a glass, putting it in the window where it became sour milk (buttermilk). We had potatoes, so she made mashed potatoes and cooked red beets. She gave me the red beet juice (soup). It was good food. I used to dig channels in the mashed potatoes and pour red beet juice and design canal systems. The things kids remember!

Another thing I remember is wandering through the wheat fields. There were some dark threatening clouds, way off in the distance. I walked towards the trees, which were one or two kilometers away. I wandered among the trees not worrying about the clouds when all of a sudden all hell broke loose. Lightning struck the trees and I was one scared little kid, making his way home through the cutting rain. I'll never forget that.

I don't know what happened, whether someone informed on us or not, but one Friday evening mom was preparing for the Sabbath, not that she was religious but it was customary. Anyway, she was baking cookies.

All of a sudden a truck with KGB troops pulled up and loaded us into the truck with whatever we could tote. I remember that the cookies went with us. I remember sitting in the truck eating those cookies. Off we went. We were transported for several days to a town. It once used to belong to Poland but now was Russian. I

found out much later that the town was *Bialystok*.

A lot of people who had crossed the border illegally were brought there. They were concentrated there. We were put up in whatever houses they could find. The people there were predominantly Jews fleeing from the Germans. There were also Poles and Ukrainians. After a while things got a little organized and we got bread ration cards. Life wasn't fancy. It was a survival diet.

That's when the bartering started. I remember that my mother took one of my dad's tuxedos and got one putt of potatoes, which is 26 pounds. That's what she got for the tuxedo. Later on, when we were traveling on the trains to Siberia, she picked up this and traded that at the stops.

The Russians made us an offer. "One, we will accept you, we will give you Russian citizenship or two, you don't accept it, we'll send you back across the border." Dad thought the sensible thing was to accept Russian citizenship. Who wanted to go back there!

Mom went into a panic, started crying and said, "I've heard that once you're a Russian citizen you can never leave, no matter what. My sisters are there. I'd rather die with them in Poland than be locked up here, in Russia, forever." There were lots of tears so dad said, "*Yadju*...if that's the way you want it ...fine we'll do it your way." Dad

declined their offer and prepared emotionally to return to Poland and face the music with the rest of her family.

They loaded us aboard trains. There were two sizes of freight cars, the 17 ton cars where they packed in 25 people and the 25 ton cars where they packed 50 people. They had these wooden slats about 4 high and there was a hole in the thing. You had to go to the bathroom in the corner. In the middle there was a Franklin stove. The water kettle, a washbasin actually, was sitting on top. They loaded us in and we were ready to go back to Poland.

They closed the doors of the wagons so nobody could get off. The locomotive started and we left. We kept going and going and going. Lo and behold, we pulled into a field. People jumped down and looked for anything they could find that would burn to start cooking, soup or potatoes, whatever they had. This was the beginning of a sort of mobile kitchen. They'd use stones or bricks, whatever they could find. They'd look for wood or coal that had fallen off the train by the tracks. Those became personal treasures. The minute the train stopped, you jumped off and started a fire to make some food.

I don't know how many stops later it was, we pulled into a big freight yard. They unloaded us and the only thing they had was hot water coming out of faucets for the purpose of making Chai (tea). I remember sleeping next to the

track on a platform. There was gravel on the ground. The pieces of gravel averaged two inches in diameter. To this day I don't understand how I could have slept on those stones, but I did. There were some soldiers guarding us. Then another train came and they loaded us back up.

Later we found out that we had been in a freight yard on the outskirts of Moscow. It didn't quite compute that we were supposed to be going West, when we showed up near Moscow.

People began to panic. They didn't know why, if it was because of the war or German bombing. The train kept going north. Most of the trains in Russia had one track. You'd keep going for hundreds of miles and then get to a shunting station with two tracks so crossing trains could bypass each other. We were low priority since the war was already going on with Russia, I think. Anyway, we were low priority so we sat for days waiting for a train or sometimes two trains to pass; sometimes we sat there three or four days.

Finally we got to the beginning of Siberia, to Archangelsk. They unloaded us and put us up wherever they could. Some people got put in a big cathedral. We were loaded on sleds.

It was muddy, wet and soggy. They had these big sleds. They were probably 12 to 15 feet long and 10 feet wide. Two horses pulled them, like a flatbed. People and their belongings were

packed on them. Those sleds functioned in mud as they did in snow. We moved a bunch of them.

We probably went about 300 kilometers East and came to a small little town, sort of a large Russian Village. Then they broke us down into smaller groups of about 150 each. They put us back on different sleds and we took off again.

I was a little kid. I remember a lot of things, the forests through which we went, the mud, the horses, the people. The dates I correlated later.

We finally arrived in a settlement. The word for settlement was *Pasolok*. The writer, Sholtzenitzen, called it a labor camp or “gulag”. Our *Posolok* was called *Chorney* (black settlement).



This is what some of the dwellings of deportees into Siberia looked like

There are said to be two Chorny Rivers in that part of Russia. We were lined up and the commissar made a speech. Dad kept repeating it for years, so I remember it. "Do what we expect of you"...in Russian of course...we had some interpreters...finally he said..."If you don't get used to it, you die"...but the word was not die in the human sense but die like a dog...croak...in German...Krepieren.

The settlement consisted of a bunch of large log houses, like cabins, single stories. Most of them 80 feet long and they had a walkway and on the right and left sort of rooms.

They had no doors but were partitioned off rooms and a family got into each one of them. The cooking if any was done, in the main aisle. There was one of those wood stoves. Wood logs had moss pushed in between the cracks.

A couple of the wood buildings were a little bigger. "The club", that was where they gave you political lectures. There was a little building where kids could get skis or wooden skates. About 1 1/2 or 2 kilometers away, there was a lake.

Next to the lake was a big sauna with rocks, like a typical Finnish sauna. You get the rocks hot, pour water on them and it would steam. You should have seen it in the Russian winter with the temperature 40 to 50 below zero. Those Russian mamas with two or three week old infants, wrapping them up and running out into the snow. They had stamina. They poured cold water on you. That was the public bath.

I remember a lot of things about there. Most of it was bad. There were maybe 30 Russians there, maybe a couple of hundred Jews, about 30 or 40 Poles, Ukrainians, and... assorted criminals. We also had Gypsies. Those Gypsies just would not do what the Russians wanted them to do. They kept stealing stuff and doing anything except what the Russians wanted. One time they jailed this woman. The jail consisted of 3 walls and steel grating. She was put in there overnight. By the next morning she was frozen solid.

The main thing about this camp was that there were woods all around. The job of those people was to cut the trees and trim them. Some people's job was to put the tip of the tree on a short sled and drag it out of the woods down to a stream, which became a river in the spring. Then they floated the logs down the river and made rafts from which they guided the logs.

Dad hit it lucky, I guess. His job was to be responsible for the horses and there were a lot of horses. They were let out at night. In the summer, those nights were very short. They worked all day so they let them go out to graze.

In the morning, he'd go out and pour some oats into buckets. No matter how far away the horses were, they heard it or smelled it and they'd all show up except for those times when there were no oats. Then dad was in big trouble because he had to go out and find those horses. One time he couldn't find the horses so they sent him away to a bachelors' camp, away from mom and me. Mom was separated from dad for three or four months. It was quite long.

They assigned mom to run one of those sleds with saws that dragged stumps. Here she was a city girl, totally unaccustomed to this kind of hard physical labor. Dad told me later about how they put her behind a horse and she said "*wio...wio*" like a coachman would do. Finally a Russian took over and let out some @#\$%*&#\$#@@ which loosely translated is what

somebody is doing to God's mother...by Russian standards... an average insult.

I remember mom once telling me that in trying to lift a stump onto the sled she burst some blood vessels, hemorrhaged and almost died...so they changed her job to taking care of the pigs...until one of the pigs went in search of its mate...at the bachelor camp. She was taken into custody by the commissars for failure to properly care for the peoples' property. The pig was apparently a good tracker and found its mate at the bachelor camp. Because the pig was returned, mom was released.

Anyway, mom just didn't cut it. She lasted about 2 days on the sled detail. Then she had another job. Mom had learned to take care of us medically. She kept some juices, roots and berries that she found there in the summer. She also had 12 little glasses. In Polish they're called "*banki*". If you got a bad cold, you swished some alcohol inside the glass, put a little flame to it, burning the air and creating a little vacuum. It then stuck to your back. If you had a cold that glass sucked up a lot of skin, almost filling it. Your back would end up with brown circles all over where the glasses had been. It seemed to induce sweating and promoted circulation. A good thing!



There's an old Yiddish expression about "bankes" "***Es vil helfn vi a toytn bankes***". It means, It will help about as much as *bankes* will help a corpse, in other words, it's hopeless. I read that "cupping" is practiced by many different cultures today. It's used in traditional Chinese medical practice and even by some of today's holistic practitioners. I even read that there was a reference to "cupping" in Egyptian medical writings dating to 1500 B.C.

There were also berries called "gulvi" that were something like cranberries or red boysenberries. They were very acidic so they must have had a lot of vitamin C.

Mom got the reputation of being the local doctor. There was no real doctor there. Off she'd go with her "banki" and roots and juices.

Apparently she did a lot of people good. Sometimes the communal kitchen would have some "schi", which some people translate as

beets. It was a local cabbage soup. Occasionally you'd get some bread. In summer you'd gather berries and mushrooms. Sometimes they gave us some flour. Other times mom traded some of our possessions that she had somehow still managed to hang on to, for some flour or potatoes. It was a very hard life.

In the early summer of 1941, I must have been 8 years old, and I worked. Down by the sauna, they had a ditch and they were making bricks. There was clay in there and they poured water in and you jumped in and stomped around and walked around in it.

When the clay had been well mixed up, they threw in some straw. Then there were forms, which you filled with the mixed clay. You flattened them out with your hand, then put them aside, turned them over, then they slipped out and dried.

When the bricks were dry they built furnaces and put them in to bake. It was like a scene out of De Mille's *The Ten Commandments*. I was eight or nine and working there

We didn't have a bakery, so twice a week one of those big sleds would go to a village, where they had a bakery to bring bread. It was about 30 or 40 kilometers away, I think. There was an old Jewish man who had two daughters. He had a big beard, I remember. He had the job of going to bring the bread. One winter, I don't remember if it was our first or second, it got very

cold. It got 60 below, easy. I remember going number one and after I was finished I discovered the pee now was a little pyramid of ice.

You were supposed to get off that sled and run beside it every so often, then get back on, relax a little bit and then run some more. Apparently the man got tired.

When it's very cold, it's very easy to doze off. He must have. By the time the sled and the bread arrived in the village, the guy was frozen solid. This was life there.

The kids seemed to survive better than the adults. Maybe the adults protected them. It was quite a shock. Everybody was waiting for the bread sled and he came in sitting on the sled, frozen.

They had wooden skates in Siberia. They were made of wood, soaked in water, allowed to freeze and then tied on to your shoes. The shoes were called "valenki" which are basically, felt boots. Off you went. They weren't too high but enough where you could skate down a hill.

Talking about clothes, the air was very cold and dry, so the "valenki" stayed dry. They never got wet. We didn't have socks but used cotton wraps. They were about 18 inches long and two feet wide cloths that you wrapped around your feet, which you then slipped into the "valenki".

The pants and tops were made of cotton quilting and kept you fairly warm. For the head you had hats like you've seen Russian soldiers wear, with earflaps. That was the uniform.

After two years, in 1941 sometime, a Polish government was formed in Russia. In honor of that, the Russians agreed to liberate all the Poles in the Russian concentration/labor camps and... because they were so magnanimous...they let us go to Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgystan more specifically, to help fight fascism by raising cotton, corn and maize.

I'd like to add one more thing to the Siberian episode before we move on to Mongolia, The first time I survived by a miracle when we survived that bunker. The second time I survived by a miracle when the bomb didn't explode.

Once, in Siberia, when I went picking berries, which grew in swamps, bogs really. I was by myself looking for "gulvi", when I suddenly found myself neck deep in swamp and moss and water. I hung on to some roots of trees and yelled my lungs out. After a while, someone happened to pass by the road and came out and got me out.

This was the third time I could have died. Judy and Steven wouldn't have been born. Their children Josh, Kaitlin & Olivia, wouldn't have been born. It makes you think! I don't believe in predestination but it's certainly something to think about.

Every time man gets high and mighty and thinks he's in charge of his destiny, he should have some humble pie and thank God."

THE STORY CONTINUES

This is the continuation of the story of our family from the time we left Siberia around 1941 and when I was born in 1942.

“When a Polish government in exile was formed by Wanda Wasilewska, the Russians began to regard the Poles, who had been sent to Siberia, as allies rather than enemy prisoners. Therefore, they released us. They told us that we could help the war effort by working on communal farms in the South.

Wanda Wasilewska (January 21,1905 - July 29, 1964) was a Polish and Soviet novelist and communist political activist who played an important role in the creation of a Polish division of the Soviet Red Army during World War II and the formation of the Polish People’s Republic.

She had fled the German attack on Warsaw in September 1939 and taken up residence in Soviet occupied Lviv and eventually the Soviet Union. She was educated at Warsaw University and got her PHD at Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

She became a journalist for various left wing newspapers...war correspondent and functionary of the Red Army with the military rank of a colonel. After consultations with Stalin she became the head of a Soviet created provisional government that was to control Poland.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanda_Wasilewska

Mark tells of the first stop in Tashkent, then *Kashgarshlak*. “There, we were picked up and transferred to a particular ‘*Kolhoz*’ or village, on a communal farm. It was called the 18th Party Congress *Kolhoz* (*Wosemanatzego Partei*) in Kyrgyzstan.

The images in the film, *Dr. Zhivago*, show what that trip was like. Sometimes the train would be diverted to a siding because of the single track, presumably to let another train pass.

We never knew if we’d be there an hour or many days. People would scramble out and take a couple of bricks, any wood they’d managed to gather and whatever goods they’d traded for...maybe a potato and started a fire to cook by or brew some tea. Eventually they’d hear the toot toot of the train and scramble back on.

We were assigned one room in the house of a Kyrgyz couple. They had a son named Karimjan. He was eventually drafted, survived the war and came back missing a leg.”

The *Hazajka* (lady of the house,landlady) took a particular interest in my mother when she became pregnant and when she was nursing me. She would bring her a little milk and some butter she had churned that day and insist that she have it. When she tried to share it with my brother Mark, who was about nine at the time, she scolded and said it was for my mother and the baby (me).

The *hazajka* was the one who delivered me. Within their culture, I would have been her child if anything had happened to my mother. Her name was *Sarahan*...similar to mine, Sara.

Some days later, my dad went to *Kashgarshlak* to register my birth. Officially my birthday is January 1, 1942. In reality it was probably a couple of days before that.

A month ago I was in Washington D.C. I took that opportunity to make an appointment at the Kyrgyz embassy to see if I could at last obtain a birth certificate, as I've never had one. They promised to try but said if I didn't get it within six months, I probably wouldn't.

I couldn't provide them with my parents' passports, they're long gone, but did the best I could with what I had. They filled out the application for me, in Russian, I think, and I brought the fifty dollar postal money order.

They asked me for the reason I wanted a birth certificate. I didn't have a great answer, as I wasn't about to apply for Kyrgyz citizenship. I told them it was part of my life story and my heritage and they accepted that.



*This is the Kyrgyz flag, (Red with Gold)
since 1992 & the fall of the U.S.S.R.,
The image in the center represents a “yurt”,
traditional dwelling and the 40 rays of the sun
represent the 40 tribes*

On that same trip I contacted the Russian Embassy and requested my father's military service record. He served in a Polish unit of the Russian Army. Chances aren't great, but some records do exist and are kept in Moscow...perhaps his.

The commune raised crops like wheat, corn and cotton and also had a communal vegetable garden. They also had farm animals. As the war conditions worsened, most of the crops were appropriated by the Russian Army and the members of the Kohlhoz (the village) were expected to survive on any root vegetable they had. The winter of 1944 was so severe that the

ground was frozen solid and the root vegetables were inaccessible at times. There was a lot of starvation.

At one point, the family we lived with was assigned to a smaller house on another road. The walls were made of mud bricks, the roof of logs, brush from the cotton plants and mud. There was no glass on the windows. Rugs hung for windows and a door. The floor was packed earth. Of course there was no indoor bathroom.

The Commune owned some land in the mountains and Mark remembers going with a group to harvest the wheat and then plant the winter wheat crop, also working on the commune, weeding with a hoe. The workers included children. Mark was about 10 then. He carried me to the fields. All the babies and toddlers were put on a blanket or cloth while everyone worked. It was like a scene from the old South in the cotton fields.

One day, the KGB came knocking on our door and took my father into custody for failing to register for the draft. We didn't know what happened to him from that point until he returned after the war. Mom went to the police begging for information but they would tell her nothing. This was in 1943.

What happened was that he was sent to a labor camp where they made cement. It was near Osh, a city on the ancient Silk Route, which is on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

The place may have been Baku. The conditions were dreadful and survival doubtful.

At some point, dad and another man escaped and joined up with a Polish military unit being formed to fight in the Polish homeland.

Mark passed a set of tefillin on to me, which I remember dad recovered at the concentration camp of Majdanek.

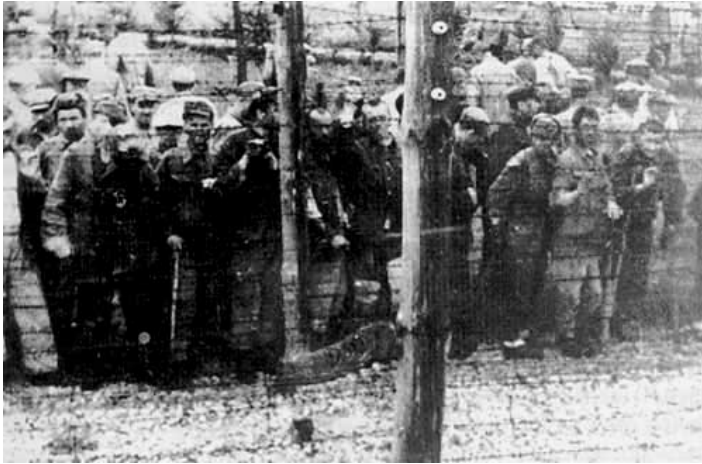




A boy praying with tefillin on

Mark said that dad told him he had been in a sapper (combat engineer) unit of the Polish Kosciusko Division, the 2nd, I think, which fought on the Russian side. It was formed after the Wanda Wasilewska Polish Government in Exile was formed. This unit along with a Russian unit liberated Majdanek. They found two or three German men and one woman dressed as prisoners. One of them had a hidden lead core whip. The Russians gave them a perfunctory trial and hung them.

The Liberation of Majdanek



*Russian POWs shown after Majdanek was
liberated*

The Majdanek extermination camp in Lublin was liberated by Soviet troops on July 23, 1944; it was the first of many Nazi concentration camps to be liberated by the Allies.

The Polish Home Army, a partisan group, joined the Russian soldiers in the battle to free Lublin from Nazi occupation. The photo below shows some of the Polish Home Army soldiers.



Polish Home Army soldiers

<http://www.scrapbookpages.com/poland/majdanek/Liberation.html>

Dad once related that when they fled from Baku, he and another man headed West because they felt that they could not return to Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan without being jailed or shot. That's when they joined the Polish Division.

During his time with this unit, he was seriously injured crossing the Vistula River. A Phosphorus

bomb or shell went off and temporarily blinded him and burned one side of his face. He was hospitalized for a long time. The skin eventually grew back normal but he never again grew whiskers on that side of his face.

During the late winter of 1944 or early 1945 my father was demobilized in the city of Lublin, Poland. Before he set out for Russia to find us, many people tried to dissuade him from returning but he was determined to find us or to find our graves!

LIKE TOUCHING THROUGH TIME

I had long ago heard the story about Lublin and the return to Russia from my dad. Through a set of remarkable circumstances, I found the proof. My cousin Ruth, who lives in Connecticut, called and told me about a website I should look into. It is called SHORESHIM. I found it through JRI-POLAND a Jewish Genealogy website.

When I found it, I caught my breath. One of the few “war stories” dad did tell me, about being demobilized in Lublin and deciding to go back and find us in Russia...here was the confirmation, staring me in the face. The feeling was beyond description. I sat staring at the screen, tears rolling down my face.

Jewish Records Indexing - Poland

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Lublin Survivors

Lublin Gubernia / Lublin Province

Located at 51°15' 22'34'

Surname	Given name	Father	Mother	Year born	Town & address in 1939
BORCZUK	Abram	Majer	Mirla	1899	Warsaw Czwartek4
BORCZUK	Tea	Lejb	Chana	1934	Warsaw Lubartowska8/15
BORCZUK	Chana	Abram	Brandla	1913	Warsaw Lubartowska8/15
BORCZUK	Lejb	Izrael	Tauba	1906	Warsaw Lubartowska8/15
BORSUK	Mieczysław	Mordcha	Estera	1910	Warsaw Kosciuszki 7

*First is dad, 2nd Tea, then her mother & father,
last is Matt Borsuk*

My father had registered as having survived the war with some kind of Jewish group and here I found evidence of that fact on the website. It listed survivors from four cities in Europe and one was LUBLIN.

Volunteers have since transferred the information from lists that were found to a computer database, so they'd be accessible on the Internet. There he was with his birthdate, his parents' names and the place he had lived before 1939. It was like touching him through time!

I found six other Borczuks on that list and while I didn't immediately know who they were, I was able to eventually make the connections and discovered they were all family.

Dad eventually made his way back to the *Kolhoz* but we were no longer there. He then tracked us to the town where my mother had taken us, Osh. We were forced there by starvation. She tried to place my brother, Mark, and me in an orphanage, but they refused us as we were not orphans. She then threatened to kill herself so that they'd be forced to accept us and I guess they believed her. They gave her a job as a maid and thereby took us in, and we survived until my father found us.

MY FATHER'S RETURN

My father had brought a few Swiss lighters and some flints in his small rucksack. These he used to trade for food. He was wearing a light summer military uniform with a square Polish cap. He had on leg wrappings, this in bitter cold weather. He traded for a half loaf of bread, a sugar beet and a sack of corn meal. These he brought when he finally found us. Mark remembered that meal as ambrosia! Mother cooked some corn meal and grated in some of the sugar beet. I suppose we hadn't had anything sweet in a very long time.

The Russians now considered dad, a wounded war veteran, a hero. As such, he was granted a concession of a small wooden stand in the town market.

Dad had been foreman in a large metal factory in Warsaw. Here he used his skill in working with metal to set up shop repairing alcohol burners. They were brass contraptions to cook on. They used to get clogged and the common way to repair them involved drilling a hole and then soldering it closed. Sometimes the heat built up to a point where the repair melted. Dad came up with a different solution that worked much better. He was able to clear out the clogged parts and they were good as new.

He also managed to get a hold of some sheets of metal. Out of these, he crafted standard sized cups. They became popular among the Uzbek

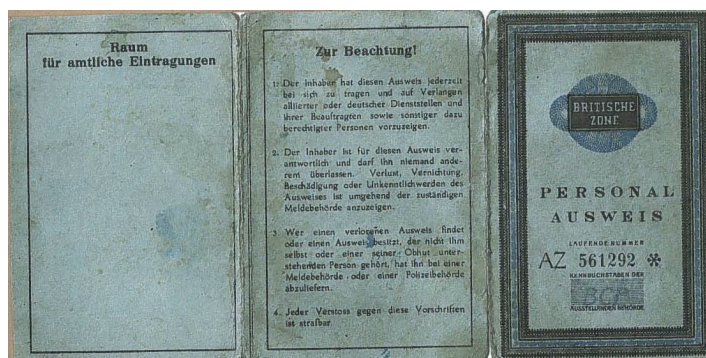
women who used them as measuring cups when they sold the milk of their goats. In this way, he was able to earn a living and we were able to survive.

When the war ended, an agreement was reached with the Polish government to repatriate Polish citizens. Around 1946 we were sent to the city of Stetin. Russia had taken some parts of Poland and in return they gave Poland some parts of what had been Germany around the Dneiper River.

The Poles weren't very welcoming to the returning Jews who had survived. Every day bodies were found in the streets. Whether from fear they would try to reclaim property or residual anti-semitism or a combination of the two, returning Jews weren't welcome.

Mom and dad decided to get out as soon as they could. Remaining Germans were being sent back to Germany. Dad spoke fluent German, having worked for German railroads as a teenager. Mother, being from Lodz, which had a large ethnic German population, spoke some German too. They claimed to be German Jews and were sent to Germany. There they were settled in a camp in Bad Godesberg, near Bonn.

I have a document from when we were there in the British Zone. The British shared the occupation area with other countries. One of these was Belgium. That was how they came in contact with a Belgian soldier. When he went home on leave, he carried a message to my aunt Betty who lived in Antwerp. She and my uncle hired a group of smugglers who got us out of Germany through Holland and eventually into Belgium.



One of the documents that showed we were “displaced persons” and “Stateless” in a German Refugee Camp in the British Zone. It was in Bad Godesberg, near the city of Bonn.



*Here I am at about age 4 ½ or 5, with a
Belgian soldier*

This is probably the earliest picture of me that exists. Somehow, my parents managed to hang on to it. I am pretty sure this is the man who helped us contact my aunt Betty to tell her we were alive. I doubt that we had a camera so it was probably taken just after our arrival in Belgium.

Mark told me of that trip in a pigeon transport vehicle that brought us to Belgium. There were pigeon races between Amsterdam and Antwerp and they would take hundreds of pigeons to each city and the pigeons flew back to their own city. This was quite popular, apparently. The vehicle was quite smelly. It made for a vivid memory for Mark, but I was only about four and a half and have no memory of it.

My earliest memory was in Antwerp, a day when my sister Lili took me to the park and grew rather frustrated that I wasn't playing with the other children. Of course, I spoke neither French nor Flemish. We didn't really know each other. She was born June 20, 1931, so she was 11 ½ years older. Her life in Belgium was like nothing I had ever experienced before. I remember being brought to a school where I felt terrified and I rather suspect I carried on some! I don't recall actually staying there.

TRYING TO FIGURE IT OUT

At this point I'm going to go back in time to explain more fully the story of how Lili became separated from the rest of us and came to spend the war years with my aunt Betty, my mother's sister and her husband Adolph...and how we came to know each other again.

I don't have all the details, as this was a very sore subject in our family and just not talked about very much. As if the pain and suffering of World War II wasn't enough, our family was torn apart.

Betty repeatedly tried to get mom to move from Warsaw to Antwerp. On one visit, she took Lili with her. Betty and Adolph adored her and apparently finally convinced mom to make the move. They also convinced her that it would be easier to sell or liquidate her business and do all they needed to do to make the move, if they left Lili with them for a short while.

Back in Warsaw my dad was with my brother Mark who was eighteen months younger than Lili and a nanny, actually two according to Mark, who took care of him. Somewhere in this time, Mark became very ill with Scarlet Fever and almost died.

Mom apparently asked Betty to bring Lili to Warsaw but her sister refused, saying it was too dangerous. The War was building to a crisis point in Austria, Czechoslovakia and there were

threats against Poland. My mother appears to have applied for another entry visa for Belgium which never came. In 1939 the Germans invaded and attacked Warsaw. It was then impossible to go back to Belgium and my mother, father and brother were on the run for survival.

A couple of years ago, I learned that Betty and Adolph had adopted Lili. I'm sure they thought we were all dead. They raised her as their own child. When Belgium was invaded, they managed to get to France and spent the war years there. Lili was hidden in a Catholic School where the nuns protected her, knowing she was a Jewish child.

Although I was too young to understand it all, I can imagine the shock when they found out my parents had survived and when they met again, joy at our survival and fear and resentment at the prospect of losing Lili, who had become their child.

I was told that Betty led Lili to believe that she had been "abandoned", or maybe that is the conclusion Lili drew upon seeing these strangers.

They barely had the clothes on their backs... didn't speak the language she spoke...their lives were obviously of quite another order than what she was accustomed to...and they claimed her as their daughter.

I can't read people's minds and motivations retroactively. I only know that it was a great source of pain all around for as long as any of them lived.

While in Belgium, my parents were interviewed by government officials regularly. It was something like the "Homeland Security" Police. Their original visa application to emigrate to Belgium had long lapsed, but they were given temporary residence in three month increments. There were specific limitations including that they could not work.

My father did find work at a leather factory that made women's handbags. The company was owned by my dad's cousin.

Dad referred to it as Traksbetrygers. I don't know if that was the name of the business or he called it that because it belonged to his cousin Traksbetryger.

That was my father's mother's maiden name. The family had a long history as "marroquinières", leather merchants, even before they moved to Belgium long before the war.

Anyway, since he couldn't legally work, they devised a way to explain how they were managing to live, without being involved in illicit activities, to the authorities. Dad sent his pay to Betty and Adolph and they in return sent us a monthly check to prove they were supporting us.

Lili remained with Betty and Adolph. She was engaged to be married. Our time in Belgium ran out. Fortunately our visa to America came through and we emigrated.

Our fallback was Israel. If the visas hadn't come through, that was one country where we would be granted entry through the "Right of Return" which guaranteed entry to any Jew.

Officially we were "stateless persons". We were sponsored by UNWRA, an arm of the United Nations. It essentially promised the U.S. that we wouldn't become dependent on the U.S. government for support. That was the extent of their help, but it was crucial, as our time in Belgium was up.



Lili in late teens or early twenties

My memories of Lili are precious few. We lived in Brussels; she lived in Antwerp. When we came to America she was an adult and engaged to be married. I was ten years old. We didn't grow up together, nor did we know each other as adults.

When I was planning my marriage, I wrote her and invited her to come. She was pregnant at the time and having a difficult time of it. She wrote and sent her regrets.

About ten years later, my husband Harvey and I took a trip abroad. I continued on for a short time, which included a couple of days in Belgium with the aim of meeting her, now that we were both adults.

I had no idea of how it would go or of the reception I'd receive, so I deliberately made it short. The meeting was magical and I found that we had similar temperaments and other similarities even though our life histories were so very different.

I determined to plan a longer visit with my husband and son. A couple of years later, we took an extensive trip through Europe. For some reason, we left Paris two days early and drove to Belgium. When we came to their home, we found they were out grocery shopping to restock the pantry. They had just returned from holiday themselves, in Sardinia, I believe.

The meeting between us, our husbands and our boys, her Daniel and my Steve, was magical! We stayed up for hours, talking.

We had barely fallen asleep when the telephone rang. It was a call from the U.S. My dad had suffered a serious heart attack.

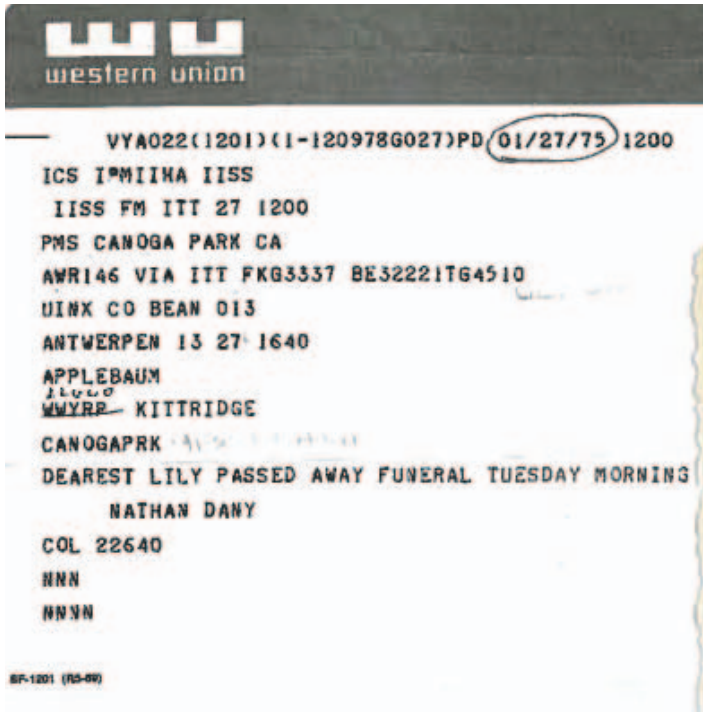
By that morning, we were on a plane heading home and not knowing if we'd find dad alive or not.

My dad survived briefly and we got to see him and talk to him, but he suffered a second, and now fatal, heart attack before ever leaving the hospital.

The next time I saw my sister, she was in the hospital in the late stages of breast cancer. She died shortly thereafter.

I had brought my mother with me, hoping for reconciliation and some peace between them.

They both said the right things, but in my heart I felt that it was not something that could ever be fixed, one of those human tragedies.



Lili died tragically young at 43

I feel blessed that I built and kept a close relationship with Lili and Nathan's son, Daniel and his wonderful family. We web-cam and visit each other often. In a way, it's been a kind of healing.



Lili's son, Daniel Neutel & his wife Michaela



Lili's grandchildren, Celine & Cedric Neutel

For the past few years, especially since I retired from being a school principal and have more free time, I've been seriously into genealogy.

There have been moments of great exhilaration and moments of immense frustration. It's been particularly difficult to trace my father's family because so many records were destroyed in Warsaw.

I thought perhaps I could do an end run and look for my father's mother's line...the Traksbetryger family... because they lived in towns in the city's outskirts and maybe their records had escaped destruction.

One day, trying to find anything out there on the Internet, I entered the name Traksbetryger and sent it into the “ether”.

Imagine my surprise when I heard from a 25 year old young man, Abraham Kahana, living in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. He too was researching that family. His great aunt had married a Traksbetryger. He wasn't a blood line relative but related through marriage and had some information about the extended family. We e-mailed back and forth several times.

In one of those e-mails, he put me in touch with a man in Belgium, Louis Phillipe Arnheim, from whom he had received a lot of documents. The man worked for a branch of an office like our Homeland Security.

I wrote him and explained my quest for information about my Traksbetryger family. I also asked whether there were any records of the time my family lived in Belgium 1947-1952.

It was many months before I heard back.

In the meantime, I told Abraham Kahana about a branch of the family I had discovered that was living at Mishmar-Ha-Negev one of the first Kibbutzim (collective farms) in Israel.

I had a picture of my family at Clara Epstein's wedding in Belgium. I finally figured out how we were related when I asked her mother's maiden name, which was Traksbetryger! What'smore, my cousin Clara remembered a framed picture of me as a little girl being in her mother's home.

In Belgium, we belonged to a Jewish social organization that raised funds for Israel. One way they raised funds was by putting on performances.

The group funded such things as draining swamps, reclaiming land and sending needed materiel like an ambulance to Israel.

I remember the blue and white "*pushke*" (small metal charity box with the flag of Israel on it) that we always had. In it, coins were saved for Israel.

This is my mother's last "*pushke*". I wrote a check to the JNF rather than take out the coins she had put in it when she lit Sabbath candles.



A Purim Play. I'm in the front Row, second from the right. Second picture I am on the far right



Here I am "On Stage"



Clara Epstein's Wedding in Belgium, 1951

Clara Epstein's family was also active in this group. This is a picture of Clara's wedding reception. Right after the marriage, she and her husband Phillipe Carmi moved to Israel, to Kibbutz *Mishmar Ha Negev*.

Imagine my surprise when I found out that Abraham Kahana not only knew Clara, but that he and his family had lived in Clara's parents' home for a brief time when he lived in Israel, after coming from Belgium and before moving to Brazil. The circle was reconnected when he moved back to Israel last year.

Back to the Belgian records... I wrote Louis Phillipe Arnheim again and he asked me to be patient as he had many requests but did inform me that he knew of my cousin Clara and her husband, Philippe Carmi, and had communicated with them about the Traksbettryger family too.

FIFTY TWO PAGES

One day, out of the blue, I received a file by e-mail with 52 pages of documents and records! To say I was amazed, understates it wildly!

Here are several examples of the documents that were included. They dealt mostly with our illegal arrival in Belgium and the problems of gaining even temporary residence:

- Notice of the arrival of strangers (aliens) from the Immigration Police
- To the Ministry of Justice regarding the arrival under “irregular” circumstances from Germany
- Letter to Commandant
- Letter from Marcus Cooperman, my mother’s cousin’s husband, on his New York Company’s letterhead, requesting that my family be granted a time extension of their stay in Belgium so that he could acquire the necessary documents for our emigration to the U.S.

This was the proof necessary that it was our intention to only stay in Belgium temporarily while “in transit” to another country. I e-mailed this letter to my cousin Howard Cooperman. He recognized his father’s handwriting and the notary’s signature. It was his father’s accountant.

ROYAUME DE BELGIQUE

PROVINCE DE BRABANT

Arrondissement de Bruxelles

Commune d'ANDERLECHT

Numéro du dossier de la Sécurité publique

19
N° 233
POLICE DES ÉTRANGERS

Avis d'arrivée d'étranger

Les ressortissant s (nationalité) POLONAIS désigné s ci-dessous, ont
inscrit s le 20 décembre 1947 au registre des étrangers de cette commune.
rue Pasteur n° 22 venant de Anvers
rue Pasteur n° 22.-

NOM	PRÉNOMS	LIEU	DATE	ÉTAT CIVIL	PROFESSION
		DE NAISSANCE			
BORCZUK	Abraham	Varsovie (Pol.)	25/10/1889	marié	mécanicien
SZAJA	Jachet	Lodz (Pol.)	20/12/1904		aucune
Enfants :					
BORCZUK	Marck	Varsovie (Pol.)	26/1/1933	--	--
BORCZUK	Sara	Varsovie	1/1/1942	--	--

Ces étrangers sont en possession d'un certificat d'inscription au registre des étrangers ~~valable jusqu'au~~
mari : "Odile C" valable jusqu'au 30 janvier 1948 - portant mention "Doit
quitter le pays après les 6 mois; Anderlecht, le 20 décembre 1947.
la femme : certificat "doit émigrer"
valable jusqu'au 6 mai 1948.

A Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur,
Office central de Statistique
Rue Royale, 65, Bruxelles.

M. l'Administrateur de la
Police des Étrangers
Place Portant, 4, Bruxelles.

Pour le Bourgmestre,
~~de la Commune d'Anderlecht~~
L'agent spécial délégué,

VU : Le commandant de police en chef,

N° Bureau

Monsieur le Commandant,

Je vous prie de donner les ordres nécessaires pour que

né(e) à
détenu(e) en la prison de , soit transféré(e)
à la frontière de
par la prochaine correspondance.

Il y aura lieu de lui faire délivrer, au moment de son
élargissement, un certificat de libération, portant la date de
sa libération, ainsi que le point-frontière sur lequel il(elle)
aura été dirigé(e).

Ce document devra mentionner, en outre, que l'intéressé(e)
qui est expulsé(e) du territoire
et qui a pénétré irrégulièrement en Belgique, venant de
, n'est pas autorisé(e) à séjourner dans
le Royaume.

Vous voudrez bien donner, dès à présent, avis de ce qui
précède à M. le Directeur du dit établissement et prier ce
fonctionnaire de me transmettre les pièces d'identité belges
dont cet(te) étranger(e) serait éventuellement porteur(se).

Au nom du Ministre:

Pour l'Administrateur de la Sûreté Publique,

Monsieur le Commandant
de la Gendarmerie,

34
OP.
MINISTÈRE DE LA JUSTICE
3e Direction Générale
Administration de la
Police des Etrangers.-
3e bureau
n 1014

Bruxelles, le 10 avril 1947

NOTICE POUR LE "MILITARY PERMIT OFFICE"

OBJET: Refaulement en Allemagne de sujets allemands et
étrangers, venus de ces pays dans des conditions
irrégulières après le 3 septembre 1944.

Nom et prénoms : SZAJA Jacht

Lieu et date naissance : Né à Lodz le 25-12-1904

Nationalité : polonaise

Composition de la famille : épouse BORCZUK Marck- deux enf

- 1) Marck né à Varsovie le 28-1-1933
- 2) Sara née à Karka Sznak le 1-1-1902.

Date de l'entrée en Belgique : le 27-2-1947

Point-frontière : Aix-la-Chapelle

Autorité qui a procédé à l'arrestation :

Circonstances de l'arrivée en Belgique :

Le mari est resté comme malade au camp de Goldsberg. L'inté
ressée et ses deux enfants ont quitté ce camp et en compa
gnie d'autres juifs ont franchi la frontière belge clandes
tinement la nuit, elle réside 33 rue Lamorinière à Anvers.

Vieillesse en Allemagne : Camp de Godesberg-Zône anglaise

Statut des pièces d'identité : Aucune pièce d'identité.
Modèle C délivré à Anvers valable jusqu'au 12 juin 1947.

Dossier: 2.169.642.

Au Nom du Ministre:
Pour l'Administrateur de la Police des Etrangers,

DE C. 5715.

47 40
Miss Embroidery Co.

MANUFACTURERS OF
MACHINE EMBROIDERY

SCALLOPING, MENDING, MACHINE SPANGLES, PUFFING, AIR TUCKING, CORDING, STITCHING, NAILHEADS

519 EIGHTH AVENUE

NEW YORK 18, N. Y.

January 9, 1948

To whom it may Concern:

This is to certify that J. Marcus
Cooperman, am endeavoring to procure
affidavits and other necessary documents
on behalf of Abram and Yehel Barozuk,
and children residing at 33 Rue Lamereniere,
Anvers, Belgium with the aim to bring
them to the United States.

We would greatly appreciate the
authorities showing consideration on behalf
of the above named and permit them to
remain in Belgium until our immigration
plans for them can be worked out.

Sincerely,
Marcus Cooperman

Seen & subscribed before
me this 9th day of January, 1948
Philip Blackman

PHILIP BLACKMAN
NOTARY PUBLIC, STATE OF NEW YORK
Residence - Bronx Co. No. 225; Reg. No. 165-B-3
Comp. Court in N.Y. Co. No. 1256; Reg. No. 743-B-3
Commission expires March 30, 1949

47 40
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Comp. Court in N.Y. Co. No. 1256; Reg. No. 743-B-3
Commission expires March 31, 1949



Marcus and Rose Cooperman.

Marcus wrote the letter to the Belgian authorities in our behalf, and greeted us on our arrival in New York

About four months after the original batch of documents, I received another 24 pages. These included documents related to the original entry into Belgium of my mother and sister and had a picture of my mother holding my sister Lili who must have been about a year old the first time they entered Belgium.

My uncle had apparently gone to great lengths to gain a Visa for my family.

He claimed his wife was very sick with a heart ailment and needed her sister's care to recover. He said that if the Visa weren't granted, he would have to care for Betty himself, which would probably require him to shut down his business which employed a number of Belgians.

There was a letter from his lawyer and one signed by six employees who asked that the Visa be granted so their jobs would not be at risk.

I presume my uncle could have hired a skilled nurse to care for his wife, and I never heard she had a heart condition, but it seems to have worked.

The documents that follow are:

- A letter from my uncle, Adolph Kuperstyk to the authorities asking them to grant my mother a Visa so she may help care for his wife who was suffering from a heart condition
- A letter from his attorney
- A letter signed by some of his employees
- Visa document for my mother & sister, Lili

9 / nvers, le 22 avril 1932.

Demande passeport, Szafra Jachet.

Mon cher confrère,
Mtro. Romans,

J'ai bien reçu votre lettre dont je vous remercie.

Mon client Monsieur Kuperstych qui a un atelier employant diverses ouvrières, va être obligé de licencier toutes ces personnes qui vont se trouver sur le pavé, si sa femme, dont la santé est ébranlée, ne peut pas être aidée et soignée par sa sœur, Monsieur Kuperstych ne pouvant pas en même temps s'occuper de sa femme et de son atelier.

Je vous prie de bien vouloir recommander mon client au chef de service qui s'occupe de l'affaire.

Le travail est assez rare pour le moment pour que l'on ne doive pas courir le risque de voir mettre sur le pavé un atelier d'ouvrières alors qu'on peut éviter cette catastrophe par l'octroi d'un simple passeport à une sœur pour venir soigner sa sœur.

L'ordre public Belge et les intérêts belges militent donc en faveur de l'octroi du visa.

Je suis certain que si les circonstances avaient été dès le début bien exposées le visa aurait été accordé immédiatement.

Merci et bien à vous,



Ondergetekenden, werkksters in den atelier van Wijnheer Kuperstyc
en die tot hiertoe regelmatig van hem werk hebben gekregen sinds
drie jaar smeeken den Heer Minister de zuster van Madame Kuperstyc
toe te laten deze laatste in Antwerpen te komen verblijven, daar an-
ders de atelier moet gesloten worden en alle arbeidsters zonder
werk vallen.

Wij dringen te meer aan daar al onze echtgenooten in gevolge
de crisis sinds maanden werkloos zijn en verscheidens van ons
een huishouden met kinderen hebben.

Antwerpen den 21 April 1932.

*Liefdecel
Guldensporenstraat 90
Borgerhout*

*Moan werkloos.
een kind
een moeder
Mme De Buisser*

De Rinkenstraat 28

*Moan ook moeder
twee kinderen
Vrouw Van Gestel
Guldensporenstraat 96
Borgerhout*

*Moan zonder werk
twee kinderen
Ryckem
Guldensporen 63. Durnest.
Josephine Van Boven
Heuvelhoek
Halle (Sant-hoorn)*

*Vader werkloos
een moeder
Hanne Pats
Liberation laan 429
Berchem.*



RES
FS

Bulletin de renseignements
pour l'obtention d'un visa de passeport

Nom : Fachet
Prénoms : Boruck
Lieu de naissance : Lidz
Date de naissance : 1904
Nationalité d'origine : Turine
Nationalité actuelle : Polonaise
Célibataire : Non
Epoux ou épouse : Non
Nom : Boruck
Prénoms : Boruck
Date de naissance : 1919
Lieu de naissance : Varsovie (Pologne)
Nationalité d'origine : Turine
Nationalité actuelle : Polonaise
Résidence actuelle : Varsovie, Pologne, Wolna 185
Profession habituelle : Après de son mari
Numéro du carnet d'étranger : Donner son sacre malade
Indication de l'autorité qui a délivré le passeport, date et numéro du I 23/136
Pays et localité pour lesquels le visa est demandé : pour la Belgique
Mode de transport : 3 mois
Fait à Varsovie, le 10 février 1932
(Signature du Demandeur)

Avis de la Légation ou du Consulat :

La police d'immigration a un avis favorable pour
un séjour temporaire
A l'exception que l'intérêt est malade - Varsovie
Belgique son mari malade Varsovie
donner la représentation
le 20 fév. 1932

MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES
ÉTRANGÈRES

Direction C

Ind. : No

MINISTÈRE DE LA
JUSTICE

2^{me} Direction Générale

Sûreté Publique

Ind. : No

Transmis pour avis à Monsieur le Ministre de la Justice,
Sûreté Publique à Bruxelles

Bruxelles, le 18-4-32

Retourné à Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères,
à Bruxelles, Le Secrétaire Public

Bruxelles, le 18-4-32

Retourné à Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères,
à Bruxelles, Le Secrétaire Public

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Bruxelles, le 18-4-32

Retourné à Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères,
à Bruxelles, Le Secrétaire Public

Bruxelles, le 18-4-32

There are some errors among the documents
and some may have been statements that were
deliberately misleading. It states in one place
that my mother and brother and I came first and

my father was still back in Germany due to illness. My brother recalls that we all came together. In one place it states my birthplace as *Kash Kar Shlak* in Poland, while in reality *Kash Kar Shlak* was in Kyrgyzstan, USSR.

It might have been an error in taking down the information. It is hard to be certain of the motivation at this remove. One thing is sure, Betty certainly was adamant that she wanted her sister to come to Belgium, and Betty was a lady who usually got what she wanted.

The documents indicated that my parents were in a refugee camp in *Bad Godesberg*. I asked Mark about what he remembers between leaving the USSR and getting to that camp. He remembers being in the town of Szczecin for a few months. The address was *Supansk 17* (per record I got from the Red Cross Tracing Service).

We lived close to a large open field or park about two blocks from the Jewish “relocation” center. People would come and read the lists or try to find other people who might know of their relatives.

Szczecin (under Germany it was *Stetin*) was part of the territory between the River Oder and Neisse, which was German but which was given to Poland as compensation for a part of Eastern Poland That Russia took.

While we were there, there was a terrible

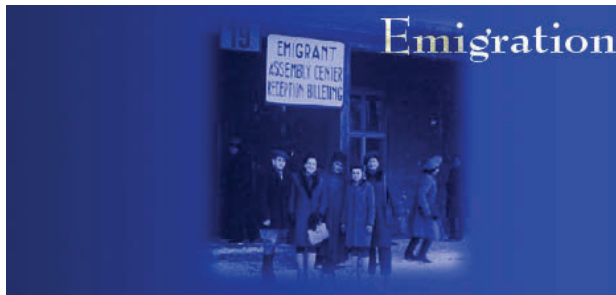
massacre. The Poles murdered two rabbis for allegedly killing a young blond Polish girl and using her blood to make cookies for the Sabbath...the old "*blood libel*"! Also a Polish Nazi element known as NSZ=*Nationalne Sily Zbrojne*-National Revolutionary Forces, threw a group of Jews off a train while on a trestle bridge.

The Communists had taken over and the only people encouraged to leave the area were Germans. Dad spoke fluent German having lived in Berlin after World War I and worked on the railroads there. Mom lived in Lodz which had a 60% ethnic German population, so Mark and I kept silent and we were apparently expelled from Poland. That is how we ended up as "German" refugees in Bad Godesberg, probably part of greater Bonn now.

Mark described the place as follows: The Displaced Persons Camp and the German Refugee camps adjoined each other. If you faced toward the Rhine River, the camps were on the right.

My father's older brother, Hershel, was working nearby at an orphanage, also in Szczecin, preparing children for transport to Israel. This was before 1948 and therefore not legal. The secret program was referred to as "Bricha", Hebrew for escape.

He probably went to Israel with the children. My uncle Hershel didn't marry until late in life and never had children of his own.



BRICHA was the organized illegal immigration movement of Jews from Eastern Europe across the occupied zones and into Israel. Perhaps the largest organized clandestine population transfer in history...The aim was to reach the coasts where clandestine ships arranged by the Aliyah Bet organization could transfer the DPS to Palestine...

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/dp/emigrat2.htm>

My mother told me that she thought her brother, Abram Szaja, was on the ship "EXODUS". He eventually got to Israel and settled in the town of Akko, near Haifa.



Abram Szaja, my mother's brother

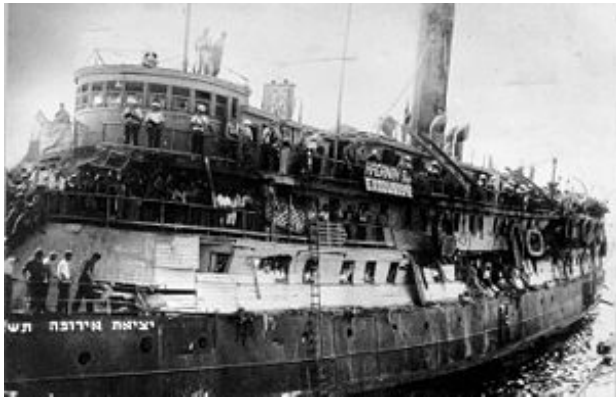
Although there have been attempts to re-create a passenger list, it is only partial, and his name is not on it. Apparently the list was created by the British who took names from the tags on suitcases the passengers were told to leave on the dock. They were supposed to be returned to them.

There was a lot of reason for secrecy so the list may never be accurate and complete.

Unfortunately we lost touch with the Szaja branch of the family in Israel although we did meet them on our trip to Israel in 1976. They didn't speak English and we didn't speak Hebrew so we didn't make a strong connection unlike my dad's family, the Borczuks.

SS Exodus

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Exodus



Exodus 1947 after British takeover (note damage to makeshift barricades). Banner says: "[Haganah](#) Ship Exodus 1947"

General characteristics as USS *President Warfield*__Tonnage:_1,814 t__Length:_320 ft (98 m)__Beam:_56 ft 6 in (17.22 m)__Draught:_18 ft 6 in (5.64 m)__Speed:_15 [kn](#) (28 [km/h](#))__Troops:_400__Complement:_70__***Exodus 1947*** was a ship that carried [Jewish](#) emigrants, that left [France](#) on July 11, 1947, with the intent of taking its passengers to the [British mandate for Palestine](#). Most of the emigrants were [Holocaust](#) survivor refugees, who had no legal immigration certificates to Palestine. Following wide media coverage, the [British Royal Navy](#) seized the ship, and deported all its passengers back to Europe.

The ship was formerly the [packet steamer](#) **SS *President Warfield*** for the [Baltimore Steam Packet Company](#), carrying passengers and freight between [Norfolk, Virginia](#), and [Baltimore, Maryland](#), in the [United States](#), from the ship's launch in 1928 until 1942. During [World War II](#), it served both the Royal Navy and the [United States Navy](#)

COUSINS, COUSINS, COUSINS.... FOUND AT LAST!



The first of my cousins I found, actually found me! She is Thea Borczuk.

It was the early sixties. Thea lived in Canada and was in Los Angeles visiting a friend who had relocated here. This was in the days before the Internet...before Facebook.

Thea's mother had always told her to look for family whenever she traveled. She looked for her mother's name and there were a lot. Then she figured she'd try her father's surname. Luckily her friend lived in the West L.A. area.

Los Angeles is a huge city and there are many different phone books for the different areas. My parents were living in West L.A. too. She looked up Borczuk, and there were only Abraham & Yetta Borczuk, my parents. So, she called. She asked if by any chance they had a relative by the name of Leon (Lejb) Borczuk.

My dad answered that he had had a cousin by that name, but he was pretty sure he had died in the war. Thea said "I have news for you. He didn't die. I'm his daughter".

The moment of our meeting was magic. We stayed in touch for a while and then, as these things go...our lives got busy...she got married and had children. I was married then had my son and then my teaching career and life went on.

The information and the pictures that follow are of Thea and her mother. They are also on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

“ Thea Borczuk, now Slawner, is the daughter of Leon Borczuk (born Feb.22,1906) and Anna Blimbaum Borczuk (born Nov.16,1910). Thea was born on May 7, 1939 in Warsaw, Poland. Leon worked as a foreman in a shoe factory in Gdansk, and Anna was employed as a bookkeeper.

Thea entered the Warsaw ghetto as an infant, and she remained there with her parents almost until the ghetto’s liquidation. A few days before the ghetto uprising, Anna left with her labor detail but did not return in the evening. The following day, another woman brought Thea with her to work.

After leaving the ghetto, Thea was reunited with her mother, who had assumed a new Christian identity. Thea spent the rest of the war with her mother in Lublin under the false names of Antonia and Teresa Kwasniewska.

Leon, who had remained in the ghetto, was sent on a deportation train to Treblinka, the death camp. He managed, however, to jump from the train. He survived the war hidden in the woods and later in an underground bunker. Leon and Anna were able to maintain intermittent contact by writing to one another at a prearranged address.

Thea was liberated from Lublin at the age of five and a half. She and Anna returned to Warsaw following liberation and reunited with Leon. Thea started school in Warsaw before leaving with her parents for France.

In 1950, the family sailed from Le Havre, France to Canada and settled in Montreal. Though Thea and her parents survived, her grandparents, Abram Blimbaum and Brandla Fajerstejn Blimbaum were both killed in Treblinka ”.



This portrait of Thea Borczuk and her mother was taken in the Warsaw ghetto on her second birthday.



*Thea and her mother in a courtyard in Lublin
shortly after liberation*



Thea Borczuk after liberation

Thea put us in touch with another cousin, this one in New York, my dad's cousin, Dr. Matt Borsuk.



Matt Borczuk D.D.S.

What a dynamo and what an amazing storyteller he was! Once Matt started talking, you might as well just relax and listen.

The most incredible thing he ever told me however was how much fun my parents were as young marrieds! He was about fifteen and used to love to bring his buddies to their home.

I found it hard to relate this description to the parents I had known all my life. I had always known them as serious, burdened by an incredible past...but fun?

He was brave and brilliant...and a survivor. Not only had he made it through Dental School, he attended Medical school in Heidelberg for a while.

As I recall the story, his friend was about to drop out because he had to return to Poland to deal with some serious emergency. Matt insisted that he couldn't let him lose his chance to become a doctor and he determined to play his part until he could return.

When Matt made it to the U.S., his Dental training didn't permit him to practice, so he determined to do what had to be done. He was married and had a son but decided he had to go back to school...and he did.

Some time after we reconnected with Matt, he came out to Los Angeles with his son, Sherwin, who was in his early teens, about fourteen. I was 22 and a new mom and attending UCLA.

Matt decided to take us to Las Vegas. He fronted us some gambling money and said we could split the winnings...as if!

Sherwin couldn't go near the slot machines or roulette wheels because he was too young, but we passed all the coins to him, because he was a coin collector and looked for interesting coins.

Sherwin is a collector now too, but of Mr. Peanut memorabilia. He is also a physician and an incredible man with a wonderful wife and children Amaranth and Ethan. He lives in Connecticut. His sister, Elizabeth lives with her husband Bill Belonio and her boys, in New Jersey.

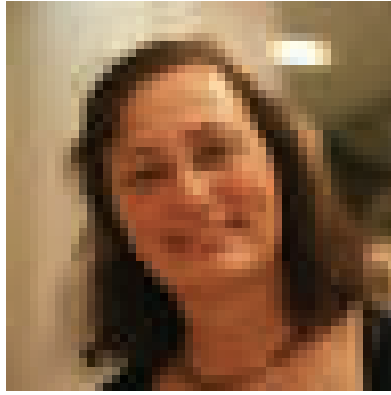
Since, we've learned of other Borczuk/Borsuk cousins on the East Coast , Serge and Jeanette and their families and yet others in Canada.

Sherwin and his dad attended the Bar Mitzvah of Edward Figlarz in Canada along with some other Borczuk cousins. Thea knows him too and said her dad Leon was very close to Edward's family. Edward's parents took Leon in as a boy when his parents died and helped him get started in business when he came to Canada.

Since Leon wasn't the only Borczuk/Borsuk at that long ago Bar Mitzvah, I'm pretty sure we're related, but haven't yet figured out exactly how. Edward Figlarz is a Barrister & Solicitor in Quebec, Canada. He has daughters and grandchildren. Have yet to meet them.



Dr. Sherwin Borsuk



Ruth Borsuk



Ethan Borsuk



Amaranth Borsuk Bouse



Brad Bouse



Elizabeth Borsuk Bellonio and Bill Bellonio



*A gathering in Las Vegas, Top row, Mark,
Sherwin, Sara & Harvey
Front row, Irma, Ruth & Ameranth*

I have another cousin in Canada, Marcel Kay. He is my mother's nephew, the son of her sister, Frane Szaja Kusmierek. He is the only survivor of his family.

Marcel was a very smart boy and aspired to be an engineer. In prewar Poland, it was hard for a Jewish student to get into a University. To make that possible for him, his parents sent him to live in Antwerp, Belgium with my aunt Betty and uncle Adolph at age 12. The war began, Betty, Adolph, Lili and Marcel headed for France. Marcel wanted to get into the fight and, as a

teenager found his way to England and enlisted in the R.A.F.

My earliest memory of Marcel was in Belgium driving a “Woodie” station wagon. It was the first specific car that I remember. I think it belonged to the business “Maison Betty” and perhaps he was working for my aunt and uncle at the time. I’m not sure. This was while I was still in Belgium.

It’s funny the things that one remembers. I remember a meal at my aunt and uncle’s home in Antwerp. I remember seeing ice cubes for the first time and a food that tasted like “ambrosia”. it came from a can...I think it had a carnation on it, and had little cubed pieces of peaches, pineapples, pears and cherries...fruit cocktail! I was easy to please I guess.

Two or three years ago, I tried communicating with Marcel with questions about his family. It was when I started doing genealogy seriously. He found it even more difficult to talk about than my brother Mark. I can understand why.

I found records on JRI-Poland that list his mother Frane and father Izak, brother Wolf and sister Lea as residents of the Lodz ghetto at Fansen Strasse 3, flat 3. They were thought to have all died in the concentration camp, Treblinka. An Izak Kusmierek, born 12-23-1900 was also listed as an Auschwitz prisoner transported to Stutthof on 10-26-1944.

Marcel survived the war, married Stephanie in England, became an engineer and had something to do with setting up the television system at the Belgian World's Fair. He eventually emigrated to Canada where his two children, Francine (a concert pianist) and Joseph (a physician) were born. Joe married and has 3 boys, Aaron and twins Matthew and Zachary.



Marcel & Stephanie Kay



Francine & Joey Kay



*Marcel & Stephanie (Kuszmierек) Kay at their
wedding in London*

When I got the 52 pages, I tried to contact my cousin Howard Cooperman. I had met him and his wife Trudy while his parents, Marcus and Rose Cooperman were alive and a couple of times after, but then we sort of lost touch. Howard was their only child.

I called the number I had but it was no longer active. I then looked for Dr. Howard Cooperman in Beverly Hills, where he had his practice. I found a lot on a Dr. Howard Cooperman, a proctologist on the Internet. He was apparently a character on the television show "*Sienfeld*". I wonder if the character on *Sienfeld* was named after him. His practice was in Beverly Hills, so maybe one of the writers was a patient of his.

I then kept on searching. It's amazing what you can find on the Internet. Anyway, I located him and then Harvey and I visited him and Trudy now living in a lovely home in Montecito, California. He is retired from his medical practice but very active. He is now a fantastic artist! He has four daughters and many grandchildren in whose lives he is involved.



Dr. Howard Cooperman & Trudy Cooperman

It does my heart good to know that the family continues and has a future, despite the loss of so many. There are many cousins who were found. They have children and grandchildren.

I still hold out hope for some of my own someday, but I'm putting the story out there, trusting to the future that it will have meaning perhaps to... my son... and the wonderful nieces and nephews and their own children who are very dear to me and all enrich my life.

I haven't talked about our visits to Israel in the 1960s. I remember a thrill running through me the first time I saw an Israeli ambulance on the street with a red Star of David, instead of a cross... and the Israeli flag fluttering in the breeze.

It was the first time I had ever been in a Jewish country! You can't imagine what that's like if you've been a minority and often an "outsider" all your life.

That first trip was the first time I experienced that feeling of being surrounded by aunts, uncles and cousins. It fed a lifelong hunger of mine in a profound way. Since you can't pick your family, I was extremely lucky that mine were such gems!

My Uncle Shea and his wife Shprintze were a loving delight! Their children, Zipporah & her wonderful husband, Yayir, are grandparents now. Their daughter Hagit was an adorable three or four year old when we first met. She's a

mom now. Ran is married. I'm not sure about Gil. Avrum was the quiet and shy one. He has a wonderful wife, Naomi. They now have three grown kids, Ehud, Tali & Omer.

I remember a time Shea and Shprinze came to Los Angeles. They stayed with my parents for a number of days. My parents lived near the corner of Pico & Robertson Avenue at the time.

One day they rejoined some of their travel mates for a day at Disneyland, which was quite far away. Somehow they found their way back by bus, something I would have been reluctant to try.

Shea tossed off that he had merely told the bus driver that he wanted to get off at Rebbetzin Avenue. Rebbetzin is Yiddish for the rabbi's wife! We all make our own meaning, I guess!

POLAND

Speaking of travel, our wonderful former neighbors, Sarah and Max Szwaj brought that about. Sarah is from Ireland and Max is from Poland and they have three delightful daughters.

Max worked at the BMW design center in Newbury Park. Max and Harvey shared a great love of cars and we all shared a love of Bea's Bakery apple cake.

We enjoyed many afternoons and evenings together talking about all kinds of things. The age difference didn't seem to be a hindrance to enjoying each other.

I also had many talks with Max about Poland. He had the perspective of another generation and of a person born and raised in Poland who wasn't Jewish and it lead to talks about people, history, religion, philosophy and many more mundane things as well.

Every time we look across the street now, we miss the Szwaj family terribly. They were like family too.

Max was transferred to Munich, Germany by BMW to head up their M car unit. A couple of years ago we went on a French River Cruise. We had several days in Paris. All five of the Szwajs flew to Paris and stayed at our hotel so we could spend a whole day together.



*Here we are in Paris with the Szwaj family
Max, Sarah, Sofia, Ella & Al*

Another time we were coming to Europe, Max asked if we could add a few more days and come to Poland. He'd fly in and meet us in Warsaw and give us a special personalized tour.

The only time I'd been in Poland was very brief...after getting out of the U.S.S.R. I was about 4 ½ and don't remember it at all. I couldn't resist the opportunity to see it now.

Max, his mom and dad and brother, Albert, all met Harvey and me at the Warsaw airport. Mrs. Sz waj brought me a tiny bouquet of flowers, a Polish custom. We were greeted graciously and welcomed warmly.

Max filled that day in Warsaw with all kinds of things: Old Central Warsaw rebuilt from the ground up after the War, the Memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the street where my parents and brother lived pre 1939, Ulica Wolska.

We dined at an authentic ethnic restaurant where the dishes were reminiscent of mom's cooking, with a little difference here and there.

One thing on the table that was different looked like a little butter carafe. The contents looked very white and had some herbs mixed in. It turns out the delicacy was "lard"...not something in my mother's Jewish cooking!

We saw a little part of the annual Sacred Jewish Music Festival in a Cathedral. It seems that things Jewish have somewhat come into vogue in Poland and there is curiosity in what was once such a significant part of the country's culture and population.

Krakow has an annual Jewish Festival that brings thousands of tourists, I understand.

I'm not quite sure what to make of it all.



The Jewish Sacred Music Festival in Warsaw



Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorial



*The street where my parents and Mark lived
before the War*



Warsaw street scene



Warsaw Street musician

The next day we headed in the direction of Lodz where my mother's family was from. We stopped in a city called Zgierz, which is in the Northern outskirts. That is where my great grandfather, Avrum Itzhak Szaja, was born on March 8, 1842.

There we saw some of the remaining old wooden houses. My great grandfather may have lived in a house like this, before moving to Lodz.



Old wooden house in Zgierz, Poland



*This is the town, near Lodz, where my
Grandfather Szlomo Szaja,
was born on
September 25, 1863.*

*My Great Grandfather, Abram Icek Szaja, was
born here on
March 8, 1842.*

*My Great Great Grandfather, Nuchem Szaja,
was born either in 1812 or 1816
and died in Zgierz
on July 27, 1852*

From there we headed to Piotrkow. I had found that some Bendkowsky family members are buried in the Piotrkow cemetery on a Worldwide Burial Registry.

We found the town but couldn't find the Jewish Cemetery. Luckily Max speaks fluent Polish. Still we had no luck until it occurred to us to find the oldest person we could and ask again. It worked. All the cemeteries in Piotrkow are in the same part of town, and we found the Jewish one.

Unfortunately, it was only open briefly, a couple of days a week, and we were there at the wrong time. We stood around, looked in and took a couple of pictures when a local person approached us and asked if we wanted to go in. She said the caretaker lived around the corner and if we knocked on her door, she would probably let us in. She did and we learned the fascinating history of this town. It had once been about 1/3 Jewish. In one tragic day, almost everybody was deported to concentration camps.

The caretaker was the daughter of a stone carver who wasn't Jewish, but his wife was. He had learned Hebrew as part of his work on gravestones. The caretaker is the last half Jewish person left in Piotrkow.

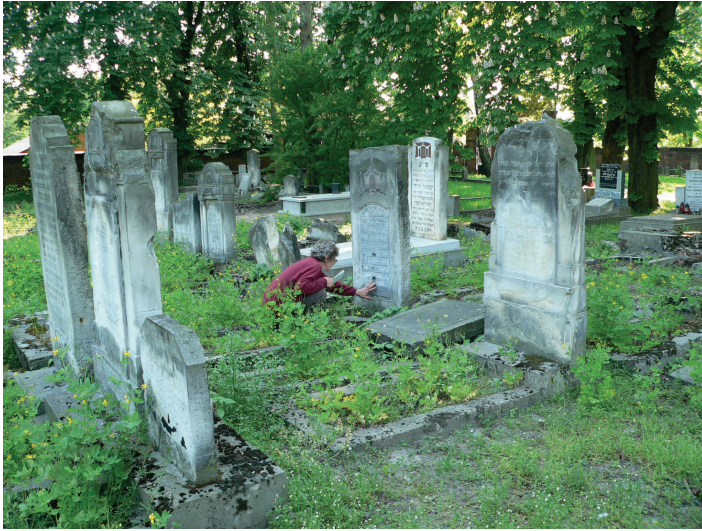
She looked through her old typed lists and found a number of Bendkowskis buried there with listings of locations within the cemetery.

Unfortunately, without a Jewish population to care for it, the place was neglected and many of the stones had fallen and were barely readable. The dates were written in letters not numbers.

The woman told us she was a retired nurse on a small government pension. She lived there with her son and got a small stipend from the government for being the caretaker. We found a brass plaque dedicated to the Jewish Population that had once lived in Piotrkow.

Apparently a little money comes in from the descendants of the town's once prominent rabbi. They built a small mausoleum there and come every so many years to hold a service. Also a Jewish congregation in Lodz has taken it on, that and the occasional visitor like us, keeps it going.

So many towns in Poland have no Jewish population now, where once so many lived their lives.



The caretaker at the Jewish Cemetery in Piotrkow, Janina Gredecka, is reading the headstone of one of our Bendkowski relatives. Her father was the stone-carver

The Jewish population of Piotrkow was once 28,000. Now, Janina, whose mother was Jewish, is all that remains.

Piotrkow Trybunalski Ghetto

<http://www.deathcamps.org/occupation/piotrkow%20ghetto.html>



Ghetto Map

Ghettos

Piotrkow Trybunalski, known in Yiddish as Piotrykov, in Russian as Petrokov and in German as Petrikau, is a town in central Poland, about 16 miles (26 km) south of **Lodz**. One of Poland's oldest cities, it had been a part of Russia **between 1815 and 1915**, before reverting to Poland in **1919**.

An important industrial centre, the principal industries were the manufacture of textiles and wood and glass products. Jews had lived there since the early Middle Ages, and by **1939** numbered some 15,000 residents, approximately 27% of the total population. The thriving Jewish community, both secular and Orthodox, supported three weekly newspapers

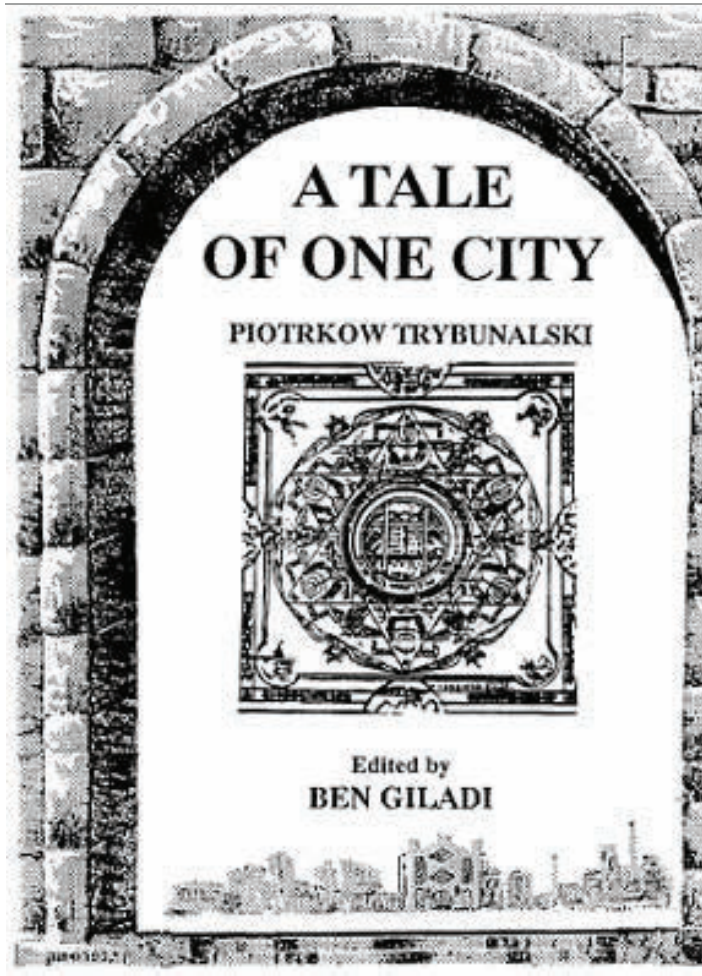
as well as a wealth of religious, cultural and political organisations and institutions.

There were numerous synagogues and houses of prayer in the town, with the Great Synagogue considered one of the most beautiful buildings of its kind in Poland. Following the outbreak of war on **1 September 1939**, more than 1,000 Jews were killed on **4 September** in bombing raids on the nearby village of **Sulejow**, where they had fled before the advancing German army.

After some initial bombing and shelling, Piotrkow was occupied on **5 September 1939**. The persecution of the Jewish population began immediately. Men were seized in the streets for slave labour. Beatings and killings became commonplace...the population was swollen by Jews from neighbouring towns and other places in Poland, including **Warsaw, Lodz, Belchatow, Kalisz, Gniezno**, and **Plock**.

**A Tale of One City:
Piotrkow Trybunalski (Poland)
51°24' / 19°41'**

Edited by Ben Giladi Published in New York,
1991





One of our Bendkowski relatives is buried here.



The Cemetery



In Remembrance

From Piotrkow we headed to Krakow, visited the old Jewish quarter, stayed at the Alef hotel and with Max's dad, attended a "Jewish" café with a Klezmer trio. The food was wonderful but it felt like a Jewish experience without Jews except maybe the patrons. I wanted to tell the musicians to smile...it was joyful music! I guess I mean it felt like performance art, celebrating what once had been. The city of Krakow was beautiful as was the castle we visited there.

On the next day we visited Auschwitz. I had debated with Harvey at length about whether I could bear going there. He urged me strongly to do it.

The day was hot, nearly 100 degrees. Max had arranged for a private tour with an English-speaking guide. He and his brother had been there before but they accompanied us for moral support.

I saw the famous sign “*Arbeit Macht Frei*” (Work makes you free) at Auschwitz and it sent shivers down my back.



Entrance to Auschwitz

There were some handsome brick buildings...didn't look so bad so far. It had been a Polish facility, which the Nazis took over. Our guide explained that they rounded up the

intellectual leaders and persons of influence first; those that might lead a resistance. Then they added any Poles that supported them. The treatment was brutal but the “Final Solution” hadn’t been implemented yet.



The wall where inmates were shot

I was able to hold it together until we came to a room with a display of old suitcases. On each of them was inscribed, in white, a family name and the place from which they had been deported to Auschwitz.

The inconceivable number, six million, was instantly converted into individual people for whom I could cry.

The worst was yet to come, Birkenau...that had been a death factory! A crematorium and some barracks had been allowed to remain. It was so eerie...this beautiful idyllic spot on which this horror existed!



We saw the train stop where thousands upon thousands of people were unloaded. We were told the creeks and rivers ran with ashes from the crematoria.

I knew what I would see. I had seen the images on film. Yet, being in the place where it had happened, where the ash had filled the sky and fallen on the ground was gut wrenching.

I asked the eternal question..."How could the people in the area claim not to know? "

The guide responded by explaining how dangerous it had been to know.

All contacts with prisoner work parties that went into the city were strictly controlled. People who knew too much... or spoke of it... or tried to help..., and often their families, were promptly arrested and met the same fate as the Jews.

All private houses within miles were razed, except for a few nicer ones kept for the Nazi officers.

Yet...where did the people in the city think all those trains were going...to what? What about the awful smell and ashes from the crematoria?



I know that ethnic cleansing and mass killings still go on today and the world essentially still stands by ...in Africa....in Croatia....Sunnis killing Shiites and the reverse....Moslems killing Christians...terrorists targeting innocents!

The Holocaust was a tragic, unique event that killed off a huge portion of the Jewish people, but evil exists still.

The desperate call for NEVER AGAIN still echoes unfulfilled.

We went from the horrible to the sublime. We walked into a small wooded area and I heard a very young male voice singing. It was hard to believe, but I could have sworn it was Hebrew.

As we came to a clearing, there was a group of about 15 Israelis rehearsing for a memorial service that was to take place later that day. It was indeed Hebrew.



An Israeli group rehearsing for a memorial service at Birkenau

I've read about the "March of the Living" where survivors come with their children and grandchildren to this place to give witness that WE , THE JEWISH PEOPLE, SURVIVED!

These survivors are getting very aged now but they are insuring that the truth is told.

I heard that at the sixtieth Anniversary march, there was an Israeli Air Force flyover. The speaker announced...WE ARE HERE...SIXTY YEARS TOO LATE...BUT HERE WE ARE!

I guess that's how I feel about that day and that visit of Auschwitz. It was unbearably hot, it was unbearably painful, but I was part of witnessing...against all odds...to the Jewish people's survival.

I was glad I had come.



Max Szwaj, Harvey Applebaum & Albert Szwaj at the Castle in Krakow

I owe Max big for that day, as difficult as it was. The whirlwind four day visit was an awesome experience and one day, I'll have to go back.

GENEALOGY

I'd like to meet the Polish Genealogist, Zdzislaw Kosicki, who did some research for me and traced my mother's line Szaja/Bendkowski back to 1790 in the Lodz area, and yet had to tell me that Harvey's grandparents records from Bielsk and Bialystok are no more. I know that they were married in Bielsk on January 10, 1901, and yet all records truly are gone.

I asked Warren Blatt, Director of JewishGen.Org, at a local Jewish Genealogy meeting, if it was possible that all the marriage records for almost a century in Bielsk could truly be gone, and in this case he said it was.

I am grateful to the organization JewishGen for the support it gives to all those seeking information about their families, as I have been.



JewishGen

An affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

I am in debt to another organization for being a tremendous resource for Jewish Genealogists with roots in Poland



Jewish Records Indexing - Poland

While thinking about those to whom I owe a debt of gratitude, I want to begin with my Muse, Helen Wyers.



Kaitlin Borden, my great niece, 3rd from the left becomes a Jr. Member of Colonial Dames. Helen Wyers is on the left

I met Helen at the YMCA hot therapy pool. She's an amazing woman, in her eighties, whose knowledge, generosity of spirit and incredible energy are an inspiration.

She's active in the D.A.R. and in Colonial Dames and has traced hundreds of her ancestors back to the colonies and beyond. She's doubtlessly

helped hundreds find their roots and the documentation to prove them. Her encouragement was always gentle and soft spoken.

When I hit a brick wall in my research, she kept encouraging me.

At one moment, I decided to switch paths and offered to create a pedigree chart for, my great nephew, Joshua's 17th birthday to accompany the, less personal, college fund check he always got.



Steven, Kaitlin, Joshua & Mary Borden



Mary Borden



Steven Borden

His mom, Mary, isn't Jewish and her roots, as far as I knew, were in North Carolina. I thought it would be a two-week project. It proved to be much easier, in some ways, to research American Genealogy rather than family from Eastern Europe. In other ways it was harder.

I became obsessed and the project lasted a year. At that time I turned over a banker's box full of records and documents tracing two lines of Mary's family back to Jamestown in the 1600s. I said it was now up to them. In some ways it still goes on, four years later!

Mary, her daughter, several of her sisters and nieces are all members now of the Colonial Dames. I have a permanent "Guest" name tag and attend their meetings. Helen even asked me to do a presentation on Sephardic Jews in Colonial America.

We were in the water...as usual...talking history and research...as usual. I mentioned Sephardic Jewry in the 1500s and she supposed there weren't any in the colonies. I begged to differ and explained that the oldest Jewish graves in the U.S. all had Spanish names. I told her about the Touro Synagogue and Peter Stuyvesant's poor welcome of the first Jews to come to our shores.

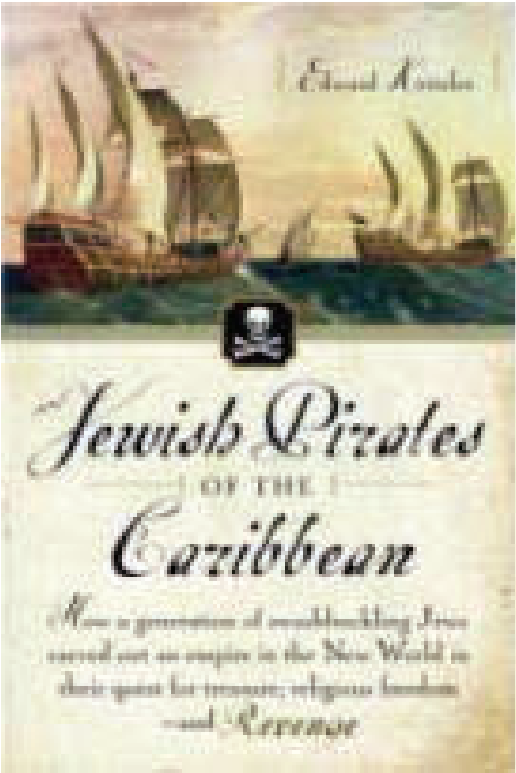
She was amazed and asked if I'd be willing to give a talk about it. I asked her skeptically if the Colonial Dames ladies would have an interest in the subject. She insisted they would but she offered to ask the Board of the Dames. The invitation was officially extended.

Now I had to do some serious research. I'm not Sephardic and my knowledge was sparse...and I

certainly didn't want to sound the fool. I read dozens of books and prepared a presentation.

One of the last and most amusing of my research books was *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean* by Edward Kritzer.

I'd never heard those stories at my mother's knee!



The presentation was well-received and great fun. They asked me to do one for the D.A.R. I've even been asked to do one for the Jewish Genealogy Society of the Conejo Valley & Ventura JGSCV.

Helen's influence continues on. I attended the World Jewish Genealogy Conference in L.A. in 2010. The speakers were wonderful and I was exhausted from the effort to miss none of them, though that was impossible. One speaker was a professor from a Canadian University who did two sessions on writing family stories. She got me all energized. I had been talking about writing our family's story for years. But, talk is all it remained.

I was telling Helen about it and the advice to join a writing group. Helen said...as a matter of fact, she'd joined such a group just a few months back and suggested I might like to do the same. Again I procrastinated. People had been telling me for years I should write it down. Helen persisted in her gentle way and look at me now! Here I am, finally doing it. Having to show up monthly, with something to share, did it! I couldn't come empty handed. Once I really started, I couldn't stop.

I can't leave out my other friends at the Y., Carolyn Depp and Mabel Wishheart. They listened to my stories and encouraged me

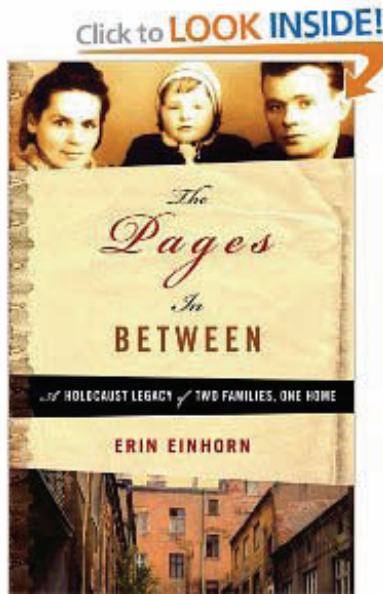
endlessly and made me feel the stories were important enough to be remembered.

Carolyn volunteered every Thursday at the Newbury Park LDS Church's Family History Library. Has done so for years. She was a patient guide and helped educate me about Ancestry.Com and about the Mormon Church's vast library of Microfilms that had images of documents of Genealogical significance from all over the world. They had photographed millions of records in the sixties and beyond by negotiating with the various governments to give them access. To my surprise, they included many Jewish records from Eastern Europe. She didn't know a lot about Jewish records but she knew how to navigate and if she wasn't sure, she recruited other volunteers like Cherie to help. She moved to Oregon recently and I miss her.

I remember hearing Erin Einhorn speak about her book *The Pages in Between, A Holocaust Legacy of two Families, One Home*. It was wonderful.

Here was a woman writing about searching out answers. She was a journalist who took a year off and went to live in Poland to understand her mother and what had happened to her and her family.

Here was a kindred spirit and there were people who cared about what she had to say. It was eye opening!



This year, 2010, NBC put out the series *WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE ?* This was even more amazing, a network putting out a mass-market show about genealogy research. It was about celebrities...not ordinary Joes and Janes like me, but awesome nevertheless.

The sponsor, Ancestry.Com has become a huge enterprise and its users are legion...who would have thought!



I'M TELLING THIS STORY FOR YOU

To the reader, I hope this memoir has been meaningful to you and will help you appreciate the importance of your own stories.

In closing, here are a few of the loved ones I'm telling this story for. It's been an incredible adventure of discovery.



*At the Malibu Beach Café in Celebration of
Harvey's 75th birthday and Celine's 13th.
Sara, Celine, Michaela, Cedric, Danny,
Steve & Harvey*



*Judy Borden, Mark's daughter,
On Stage, she's Alessandra Marc*



Olivia Brakel, Judy's daughter



Olivia & Harvey



Steve Applebaum



Left around to right: Irma, Celine, Sara, Danny, Harvey, Michaela, Cedric and Mark



Steve & Harvey



Steve



In the Grand Canyon, Celine, Cedric Danny & Steve



Steve snoozin with Rocky



From front left, around to right: Kaitlin, Sherwin, Harvey, Sara, Brad, Amaranth, Steve, Mary, Ruth & Josh. We are at Cantor's Deli



Sara Borczuk Applebaum

Survivor

Genealogist

Bearer of Memories

Teller of Tales

Acknowledgements

First I want thank my brother, Mark who has served as my memory of the time before I was born and when I was too little to remember. I know how hard it was to allow the memories to resurface and to retell them. I am profoundly grateful.

And Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and Spielberg's Shoah Foundation in Los Angeles which are honoring the victims and survivors of the Holocaust by collecting testimonies while some of the

survivors who lived it are still
here to tell the tale.

Also, to the countless Genealogical
Societies around the world and the
millions of individuals that care
enough
to find, collect and preserve their
family heritage and thereby make
sure that the stories are never
forgotten,

And my Muse and friend, Helen
Wyers, who has helped so many
searchers, like me.

Thank you

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to

*My parents, Abe & Yetta Borczuk,
of blessed memory, whose story is
my story too*

*My husband, Harvey, who has
walked through life with me these
last fifty years*

*My son, Steve, for whom these
memories are a heritage*

*The memory of all the lost
martyrs who have not been found*

